HOME OFFICE

Equality and Fairness in The Fire Service

A Thematic Review by HM Fire Service Inspectorate

"Founding a Cultural Equality"

Part One Main Report

September 1999

Terms of Reference of Review

The review will examine the extent to which all elements of the concept of equality and fairness at work are being embraced by the fire service. It will identify positive achievements and any failings, drawing conclusions as a result. It will also look at service delivery to explore if there are elements of discrimination, which need to be considered.

A report of the findings of the inspecting team will then be published. The information obtained and the good practice identified by the thematic review inspection will be used as a basis for subsequent assessment of this vital area in the full fire brigade inspection programme. The database will be continuously developed to ensure that emerging trends are captured.

Recommendations will be drawn to the attention of the Equal Opportunities Task Group, of the Joint Strategic Committee on Personnel of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, in the expectation that further activity or research may be commissioned where necessary.

Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 This report with its separate booklet of appendices, is the result of a thematic review of equality and fairness. It is the first of a series of inspections conducted to examine issues of national importance to the fire service. The choice of this particular topic resulted from concerns that, for whatever reasons, the profile of the service's workforce is not representative of the multicultural community it serves.

1.2 Despite the efforts of many in the service, on 31 March 1998, there were only 513 people from black and ethnic minorities and 436 women employed in a service with a wholetime uniformed (excluding control room staff) strength of 33,597 and a retained service of 14,483.

1.3 Our study has been targeted at establishing a balanced representation of existing policies, practice and performance and sets out the conclusions which have been reached. It makes recommendations for consideration by all who have responsibilities for the fire service. It is also intended to draw attention to good practice in the hope that lessons can be learned from these positive aspects as well as highlighting the considerable challenges faced by the service. In many cases these challenges require major change to eradicate outmoded culture and to embrace a spirit of real commitment to equality and fairness. These needs apply both in employment practices and to improving the delivery of services to the public.

The Review Format

1.4 The process followed in conducting the review has been at four distinct levels. The first of these was to establish an inspection team with appropriate experience not only of the issues directly relevant to the fire service, but also of the complexities and subtleties of dealing with aspects of equality and fairness in the community at large. A Fire Service Inspectorate inspection team, under the leadership of HM Inspector of Fire Services, Robin Currie, was assisted by three specialist advisors. These were Jayne Monkhouse, employment policy manager in the Equal Opportunities Commission; Mark Carroll a management consultant working for Ionann and Margaret Penton, fairness and equality manager of the West Midlands Fire Service. In addition, Kung Lee, of the Commission for Racial Equality attended one inspection as an observer.

1.5 This team initially examined existing data, considered current information on equality issues and consulted with key organisations, obtaining advice from a wide range of regulatory authorities and organisations which had experience and expertise in this area. Despite the availability of a substantial statistical database

collected and published by the Home Office Fire Policy Unit since 1992, and background information provided by the 'Equal Opportunities and the Fire Service' Research Report in 1994, (Tom Bucke, Home Office Research and Planning Unit paper 85), there was little other definitive information on which to base the review.

1.6   It was therefore necessary to obtain additional information. Three separate questionnaires were circulated. One was directed personally to all chief fire officers a second requested the views of the chairs of all fire authorities. Both documents concentrated on aspects of policy and practice because national data, collected as part of the annual statistical return and published during this review, was already available. A third questionnaire sought the views of all the Racial Equality Councils.

1.7   **The questionnaires were used to identify the most relevant issues, in order to maximise the time spent in brigade inspections. The responses received are included as appendices A, B, and C, in the separate appendices booklet. Some specific issues are also referred to within the text.**

1.8   On the basis of the information gathered during this phase, a work plan was drawn up to ensure the most effective use of the inspection process. One aim of this was to reduce unnecessary demands on brigades. Once the questionnaires had been returned, the programme of brigade inspections was agreed with the selected brigades. Care was taken to ensure a balanced representation, by type of area served and the constitutional arrangements in place.   The following ten brigades were inspected:

- ➲ Avon
- ➲ Bedfordshire and Luton
- ➲ Greater Manchester
- ➲ Hereford and Worcester
- ➲ Leicestershire and Rutland
- ➲ London
- ➲ South Wales
- ➲ Tyne and Wear
- ➲ West Midlands
- ➲ West Sussex

1.9   The inspection team greatly welcomed the support and assistance provided by these brigades. It is also relevant to record that many other brigades were disappointed that they had not been included in the inspection process.

1.10   The team also visited the Fire Service College to look at the provision of central training and assess the way in which equality and fairness issues were dealt with. We met the national officers of the Black Ethnic and Minority Members and

the Gay and Lesbian Fire Fighters Association of the Fire Brigades Union. We also had discussions with representatives of Networking Women in the Fire Service. The Permanent Secretary's Race Relations Advisor, Trevor Hall, was also consulted.

1.11   The inspections followed a consistent format wherever possible, only varying where structural arrangements, or the availability of staff, made this necessary. The inspection team, working in three teams of two, visited each of the brigades. A typical example of the programme is set out in appendix D. Policies and procedures relating to equality and fairness together with the managerial arrangements to ensure their achievement were examined during the visits. They were tested against the experiences of staff throughout the organisation to assess their effectiveness. In order to enable discussions to be meaningful, the team dealt with each meeting on a confidential basis and offered further private discussion outside the programme when appropriate. Although each inspection followed an agreed structure, the team maintained a flexible approach to its task.

Feedback

1.12   At the conclusion of each inspection, the team provided verbal feedback to the chief fire officer and members of the brigade management team. These sessions were detailed and frank but maintained the confidentiality of individuals and groups of staff. All brigades responded very positively to the feedback at the time. The team has been encouraged to learn of a wide range of immediate actions which have been implemented on the basis of those sessions.

Findings and Conclusions

1.13   The report consists of this introduction, an executive summary, the list of recommendations and two chapters which set out the main substance of the review. The first chapter sets out the findings of the team. The second contains the conclusions reached. These chapters bring together issues which were identified consistently during ten inspections. In some instances examples are given, but individual brigades have not been identified. A notable feature of this review was the remarkable level of consistency in the findings across all of the brigades inspected. The appendices – A to E, are presented in a separate booklet.

A Powerful Methodology

1.14   The nature of this thematic review with its particularly 'people orientated' approach, has proved a powerful methodology with which to dissect the overall managerial process. This approach is one that might be equally revealing in many other organisations. The critical and far reaching comments and findings that follow, together with the conclusions set out in the next chapter, have much broader

implications which will need to be addressed. The weaknesses and shortcomings identified have some application in all the brigades inspected and apply in their entirety to some. They reflect the widely held concern about the way that the service operates, the role of fire authorities and the manner in which some senior and intermediate officers discharge their responsibilities. These failings are supported by evidence which is so consistent that it is a matter of concern to all involved in fire service management.

2   Executive Summary

2.1   This report is the result of the first thematic inspection carried out by HM Fire Service Inspectorate. The last study of equality and fairness in the fire service in England and Wales was a Home Office Research Report, published in 1994.

2.2   A multi-disciplinary team inspected ten fire brigades across England and Wales, examining policies and procedures together with the managerial arrangements to implement them. These were tested against the experiences of people and groups in each brigade, and followed up through national interest groups, in order to assess the effectiveness of these arrangements and commitment to them.

2.3   The report is in two main parts. The first - sections 4 to 13 - sets out the findings of the team; the second - sections 14 to 23 - contains the conclusions reached. It also refers to the results of three substantial questionnaires used to obtain information during the review which are published in a separate booklet. This also provides a checklist of issues relating to equality and fairness for fire brigades.

2.4   The findings of the review are critical of many aspects of the management of equality and fairness in the fire service. They also point to the contribution to the unsatisfactory situation made by the overriding culture within the service, including relationships and leadership style. The criticisms apply across all the organisations responsible for the fire service.

2.5   **The conclusions point to a need to review a range of leadership and cultural issues in addition to taking specific steps in a wide range of areas, to improve the practices attaching to equality and fairness. They also point to significant training needs towards improving the understanding of the need for diversity and encouraging support for this.**

2.6   A total of 23 recommendations are provided. A list of the recommendations follows this executive summary.

2.7   The outcome of the review will be seen by all in the service and those responsible for it, as a great disappointment. It also presents a major challenge. The criticism it contains strikes at the heart of a service which is most highly regarded by the public and flies in the face of the very strong service delivery ethos. The strong message is that the failings are those of omission rather than of commission. As a result, the attention of the leadership of the service to this vital issue and recognition that the changed role of the service towards a greater

involvement in communities will demand a new approach, can be expected to make rapid impacts.

2.8   There is an overriding imperative for the service to move forward to recognise the importance of diversity in every context and welcome the opportunities and benefits that diversity brings.

3   Summary of Recommendations

The team's recommendations are as follows. We recommend that:

15.4   **1.   the entire leadership of the fire service takes positive steps to display commitment to equality and fairness;**

15.11   **2.   the findings within this report should be used to support the application of HM Inspectorate's published 'Expectations' during brigade inspections of all kinds;**

15.12   **3.   a further full thematic review should be planned, to report during the fourth year (2003) following publication of this report;**

15.16   **4.   the benefit of providing an external point of reference to fire authorities through the appointment of individuals to them who are not members of the elected constituent authorities be actively pursued through the CFBAC;**

15.18   **5.   the Equal Opportunities Task Group be strengthened and that recognised minority support groups be granted membership of, or access to, the Task Group;**

15.21   **6.   a thematic review enquire into the leadership of the fire service and other issues identified in chapter 2;**

16.2-16.4   **7.   the Equal Opportunities Task Group produce a note for guidance, based on existing best practice, to include model equality and fairness policies. Brigades should set up arrangements to monitor the implementation of the policies;**

16.6   **8.   each fire authority ensures appropriate resources are deployed to match their expectations in respect of equality and fairness;**

16.8   **9.   in all brigades there should be an Equality and Fairness Specialist Advisor post (or posts in larger brigades). In the smaller brigades, this role might form part of the duties of the appointee, rather than a full time commitment;**

17.8   **10.   brigades take steps immediately to encourage an open, inclusive team culture at all levels;**

11.   each brigade should take positive steps to introduce a culture that values the contribution that can be made to it by women, that facilities required by women firefighters are introduced as a matter of the highest priority and that these aspects are monitored and reported upon by HM Inspectors;   *17.16*

12.   the Equal Opportunities Task Group consider a common protocol for working practices and facilities for women and that this is made available to the service;   *17.17*

13.   steps are taken to enable members of the fire service from black and ethnic minority communities to encourage others from those communities to pursue a career in the fire service;   *17.20*

14.   brigades take steps to review and strengthen the protection of members of the service who come from the gay and lesbian community, through the inclusion of sexuality within equality and fairness policies;   *17.22*

15.   the extent to which common recruitment systems can be developed should be examined through the CFBAC;   *18.2*

16.   centrally supported and managed retained recruitment procedures be put in place in all brigades;   *18.7*

17.   the Equal Opportunities Task Group review the initiatives to achieve targets conducted by various brigades and circulate guidance to brigades;   *18.11*

18.   the Equal Opportunities Task Group should consider how planning and provision of training can be supported, as a further priority, and report to the Joint Strategic Committee on Personnel of the CFBAC on the implications;   *19.6*

19.   brigades give early attention to improving the understanding of the importance of language;   *19.8*

20.   the Equal Opportunities Task Group examine the options for more flexible working practices;   *19.11*

21.   brigades introduce arrangements to provide high quality mentoring schemes for all who need them;   *20.1*

22.   all brigades have a clear, high profile policy dealing with harassment and bullying of all kinds, together with effective procedures for dealing with cases;   *20.2*

23.   all brigades review their arrangements to ensure that staff of all kinds can gain high quality personal help and support in any circumstance when they need it.   *20.5*

4 Leadership

4.1 Of all the issues arising out of this thematic review, it is probable that the most important is that of leadership.

4.2 The policy leadership provided by the present Home Secretary has been clear and unequivocal. In his speech to the Local Government Association Fire Conference at Sheffield on 3 March 1999, the Home Secretary said that one of the key criteria for judging the success of public services was how effectively they promoted fairness and equal opportunity both in the provision of services and in their own employment policies and procedures. He described the fire service's record to date in the field of equality as unacceptable. The Government wanted a fire service that looked like Britain in all of its diversity. That could only strengthen the service and its reputation. It was time for the service to stop making excuses and to set its house in order. Subsequently on 28 July, the Home Secretary published challenging targets for recruitment, retention and progression of ethnic minority staff in the police, fire, probation and prison services and for the Home Office itself. Targets would be rigorously monitored and progress regularly evaluated. He has also agreed that for the fire service, targets for the recruitment, retention and progression of women must also be set.

4.3 In the fire service, direct leadership is the responsibility of the fire authorities, discharged both through their elected membership and through their chief fire officers. At national level the Home Office is responsible in England and Wales for the service advised by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC), a body consisting of representatives from a wide range of interest groups, including the service's employers and its employees.

We found that, in a number of respects, the bodies responsible for giving leadership to the fire service had so far failed to date to provide sufficient direction in respect of equality and fairness.

The Role of Members of Fire Authorities

4.4 The team examined the role of the members of fire authorities and was able to discuss their involvement with representatives in all but one of the brigades. The questionnaire sent to all chief fire officers demonstrated that in their own perception, 14 authorities gave this topic the highest level of importance, with a further 25 rating this as important. The team's perception was different. With notable exceptions, while discussions revealed commitment and excellent intentions, it was clear that this alone was not enough to provide the essential high level direction to the service. The questionnaires to chairs of fire authorities were returned by only 33 of the 50 to whom they were despatched.

4.5   Discussions with members revealed that their knowledge of the issues and their understanding of the equality and fairness responsibilities of their authorities were not well developed. Although some members had benefited from training courses, overall, the level of knowledge was not consistent with the requirements of this aspect of their role. This shortcoming affects the ability to provide leadership. It also undermines the credibility of policies and statements, where actions and terminology are contrary to the underlying principles. Examples were also disclosed of the apparent reluctance of members of fire authorities to support disciplinary awards made against members of brigades whose conduct had contravened equality and fairness orders and instructions, thus over-riding the decision of the chief fire officer.

The Role of Chief Fire Officers

4.6   At chief officer level, our findings indicated variations in the extent to which leadership was given in advancing equality and fairness. In most cases, these officers and their principal officer management teams, declared strong commitment to achieving equality and fairness throughout their brigades. In one case, however, the team was told that the brigade had needed a 'break from equal opportunities', in view of the overall demands and pressures of recent years.   On the basis of our inspections, the reality in this brigade and in most of the others, was rather different.

4.7   Substantial efforts had been made to carry this commitment into operation in some brigades. In others, however, there was little real evidence of achievement, certainly as far as the desired outcomes were concerned. In other cases, strong messages from the chief fire officer were being diluted or even undermined by the management chain. There were clear failings in the monitoring of results, exacerbated by misleading information from intermediate officers. There was also a number of instances where good intentions to seek improvement had resulted in concern, and sometimes fear, about the implications of 'getting it wrong'. This invariably resulted in staff over-reacting and interpreting the message in a negative way.

In every brigade there was a ready acknowledgement that there was still a great deal more to be done. Every feedback session resulted in a new resolve to increase the brigade's commitment to advancing equality and fairness issues.

Communication

4.8   A most significant issue is that of communication. Communication levels are not meeting the requirements of the staff in most of the brigades inspected. Messages were often inconsistent and unclear.

4.9   Inconsistency of approach and unfair practice, supported by powerful examples, are common complaints. **A culture of fear and mistrust was strongly indicated in some brigades, with similar overtones in several others.** Managerial style was often seen as outdated with excessive importance being attached to the rank structure.   Those brigades which were the subject of the most adverse comment from members of their workforces appeared to have difficulty in dealing with change.   There was difference of interpretation between the objectives of management and the meaning placed on them by most of the workforce. Everyone involved appear to accept the 'status quo'. The relevance of the outdated culture in supporting this maintenance of the 'status quo' is mentioned in the remainder of this report.

4.10   Two brigades reported improvements in managerial approach and style following changes in leadership. **Examples of individual chief officers being recognised as 'champions' of the cause of equality and fairness also exist.** Our view is that prerequisites for real and lasting improvement must be a substantial reinforcement of the importance of leadership and the enhancement of the effectiveness of communication to confirm it.

The Role of the Public

4.11   Examination of equality and fairness issues has highlighted a lack of connection between the public and the service. This justifies wider consideration. There was no evidence to suggest that the general public has played a part in driving this important topic in any brigade. Despite the obvious lack of representation of women and members of the black and ethnic minority communities across the fire service, there is no tide of opinion calling for change. The fact that this is also true within the black and ethnic minority communities themselves is surprising but was borne out by all of the responses we received from Race Equality Councils. Equally, there is little recognition on the part of the service that it would be important to engage the wider public in such a debate.

The Role of HM Fire Service Inspectorate

4.12   HM Fire Service Inspectorate also has an indirect role in the leadership of the service.   Through the inspection process the Inspectorate is able to identify good and poor practice, and bring the need for improvement to public attention.

The Local Government Association (LGA)

4.13   This important association represents the interests of local government in England and Wales, since all fire authorities are currently members. As well as pressing the interests of the public and local government in general, it acts as the employer organisation for fire authorities. It maintains a Fire and Emergency

Planning Committee to discharge these responsibilities. As with all the organisations discussed in this section there is no doubt that the LGA is committed to ensure equality and fairness in the services for which its councils are responsible. Following on from the activities of the Association of County Councils (ACC) and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA), which it replaced, it has encouraged fire authorities and their elected members to afford high importance to this topic.

The Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association (CACFOA)

4.14   This association, which represents virtually all chief, deputy and assistant chief fire officers, has been to the fore in encouraging its members to give high priority to equality and fairness. It has done so by arranging events and seminars as a vehicle to explore policies and practices; by arranging for a nationally supported network to enable joint activity, training and the exchange of ideas. It has made very positive statements about its intent and is encouraging the commitment of its membership to equality and fairness.

The Role of the Representative Bodies

4.15   The representative bodies within the service all have a contribution to make in leading their membership through employment issues relating to equality and fairness. They also have the ability to contribute to the wider development of policy. During the inspection a range of representatives were met, either independently or in groups, and their perception of the extent to which their expectations were being matched, in respect of their involvement and the environment in which their members work, were discussed.

4.16   The contributions made by each of the unions varied, depending on the overall level of representation within the service and the recognition afforded to them. Overall, we met representatives of the Fire Brigades Union; Unison; the Fire Officers Association; the Retained Fire Fighters Union; the Transport and General Workers Union; the General Municipal and Boilermakers Union and the Amalgamated Union of Engineering Workers. Although all these unions are important within the workplace, most of them represented comparatively small numbers of staff. As a result they felt somewhat at the margins in comparison with the position of the Fire Brigades Union. This meant that their potential contribution was sometimes ignored, or that their commitment in leading their membership was not maximised.

4.17   **It was found that the most significant involvement by far was on the part of the Fire Brigades Union. At national level, a clear leadership role has emerged for this union.** They have been particularly active in pursuit of equality issues over recent years and it is to their credit that most local officials have willingly

accepted this emphasis. This leadership has resulted in extensive training for its officials to enable them to support policy objectives. The benefits of this were evident during our discussions with the officials we met in brigades. The union has also enabled support groups for those in minorities within its membership, as well as providing 'help lines', to support the broader membership. This work has been enhanced in most brigades by a philosophy of non-partisan joint working between the union and management which has enabled progress to be made irrespective of other industrial relations business. In some of the brigades inspected, however, local officials had withdrawn from working with management even on this issue. In spite of this generally positive organisational approach, it is clear that the Fire Brigades Union has a great deal to do to ensure that its membership is enlightened and encouraged to support equality and fairness.

The Leadership Partnership

4.18   It is encouraging that recognition of the need for partnership among the organisations representing the leaders of the service has resulted in close joint working on equality and fairness between the Home Office, the Local Government Association, the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association and the Fire Brigades Union. The benefits of this are already being recognised by the partners. The fact that this importance is being afforded to leading the service towards improvement, is a powerful message to all connected with it.

4.19   **Despite the evident commitment of all the bodies mentioned, positive outcomes, which are the only measure of success, have yet to be achieved.**

5 Policies and Procedures

5.1 The policies and procedures to advance equality and fairness were at very different stages of development in each of the brigades inspected. This position was reflected in the questionnaire responses on this topic. Four of the brigades inspected were about to issue new policies, and two had just done so. There were two excellent examples of inclusive, fully developed policies being in place, supported by full documentation that had been made fully accessible to the whole workforce. The documentation was produced in a user-friendly format designed to encourage rather than coerce, with individual leaflets being produced to give information or advice on particular topics. In these cases the policy was clearly owned and reinforced by the fire authority.

5.2 In the other brigades, notwithstanding that in a substantial number it was possible to examine new draft revisions, there was a lack of up to date inclusive and consistent policies. These documents had sometimes been developed in the brigade, born out of a consultative process aimed at achieving the support of staff. In other cases policies which had evolved elsewhere, such as in county councils, had been assumed to be appropriate, even though brigades have been advised to create their own, directly applicable policy documentation since 1991. Unfortunately neither process had resulted in comprehensive policies being evolved. Some included legislative inaccuracies. Others omitted important information, such as the time limits for complaints to employment tribunals. This finding is disappointing since shortcomings could be rectified comparatively simply. Policy development and implementation were seen as significant contributors to failings overall.

Policy Development and the Role of Officers and Advisors

3 Examination of the methods used to develop policies revealed that there is a need for most of the brigades to provide greater clarity of the management processes, both in evolving and developing policy and in supporting it. This need was also evident in determining the comparative roles of specialist equality and fairness managers or advisors and those of the brigades' officers and managers overall.

5.4 We found that in the brigades where high quality, committed specialists had been appointed, all were involved in valuable work. Their availability, however, made it all too easy for other officers to become detached from the management of equality and fairness. Instead of officers becoming beneficially involved in dealing with issues from the outset, the availability and prominence of an expert encouraged detachment in all the brigades. Not only is this 'hands off' role inconsistent with the officers' duties overall, it also sends messages that equality and

fairness is in some way different from all other policy matters and so not a 'mainstream' service related issue. These characteristics applied to the most senior officers as much as to junior officers. **There are encouraging signs that there are more individual officers wishing to be enabled to take on a much more positive role in the management of this important and fundamental issue, than wished to remain distant from it. There are, however, substantial empowerment and training implications for most brigades in taking this approach forward.**

5.5   The enhancement, or re-engagement, of the officer role requires a new focus for the specialist manager or advisor, in respect of their own proper roles. Those we met were being distracted from their principal task of providing advice and developing policy by constant and unnecessary front line 'case-work'. In some cases the advisor was so extensively involved in every aspect of equality and fairness that they had become the brigades' 'guardians' of the topic. We were concerned that the expectations being made of some of the individuals in question were unreasonable.

Action Groups

5.6   Task groups, action groups and focus groups were being used to varying effect in most of the brigades. Where empowered by the reporting arrangements, they provided a valuable prompt for initiatives and policy development. In other cases their role and terms of reference were less than clear. In others, they could not be said to be properly representative of the interested parties. It was also unfortunate that some of these groups also lacked confidence that their contributions would be valued and there was concern that the motivation behind their establishment was little more than going through the motions of showing a commitment. **In the best examples, however, these groups were being used as real drivers of improvement. These successful groups were characterised by working to well considered plans, with targeted outcomes and by having a committed, high quality, empowered, membership.**

Inclusive Policies

5.7   The need for policy improvement is just as great in respect of overall fairness at work as in dealing with equality issues for members of minorities. In some of those brigades that had effectively incorporated fairness for the workforce and the public fully into their policies, it appeared that the workforce felt less threatened in considering these issues. In some, but not all brigades which had adopted this approach, there appeared to be a marked improvement in the attitude of the staff towards those in the service within currently under-represented groups. It was also clear that many could readily identify with the adversity caused by bullying and harassment, often because of their own experiences at some stage of their own careers.

5.8   The existing arrangements and levels of understanding revealed consistent problems of comprehension in all parts of the uniformed service; that is, the lack of ability or preparedness of so many of the people to recognise the true nature of 'fairness'. The common interpretation was found to follow a path of:

'fair=equal=the same=identical'

rather than recognising that fairness and equality are not capable of being judged on the basis of inputs, since any conclusion needs to be based on the outcomes. **We did not encounter many people welcoming or celebrating diversity or ready to encourage wider participation of minority groups.**

Dissemination of Policy

5.9   The method of policy dissemination varied between brigades. In some cases every member of the brigade was issued with a personal policy document, sometimes with a requirement that receipt be acknowledged by signature. Apparently this is due to a belief that such an acknowledgement absolves managerial responsibility in the event of an omission by the employee. This is an unfortunate message.   At the other extreme, the policy was merely subsumed in brigades' standing orders or instructions. These orders were, by their very nature, prescriptive rather than informative. Other than in the best examples, there was a surprising lack of attention in these documents to the reinforcement of the rights and responsibilities of individuals.   This lack of understanding was reflected in the practices revealed during the inspections and may have resulted in the deficiencies found in the training for this aspect.

5.10   The format of the policy document also had an effect on the ability of staff to realise that it existed as such. In some cases lack of accessibility had resulted in those at risk being disadvantaged. In brigades where it was part of the orders, staff demonstrated little knowledge of its existence with a corresponding lack of understanding of the issues. Where policies were not subsumed in this way, but published as a high profile easily identified initiative, there was clear recognition of their existence, their status and their importance. It was in these brigades that personal issue and explanation of the policy document was an integrated part of the management of equality and fairness. **It is important that policy is capable of enforcement, but the best brigades succeed by doing this more informally.**

5.11   It was also noted that emphasis on 'awareness' training was detracting from the provision of training on policy issues, which were clearly not being covered adequately. The questionnaire information revealed that two brigades did not have any policy dealing with equality and fairness, which was disappointing.   At the same time, it indicated that 33 brigades had revised their policies in the past two and a half years.

Monitoring

5.12　Even in brigades where policies were well developed, there were no consistent monitoring arrangements, and this deficiency was often further compounded by a lack of information. Where actual difficulties or failures in equality issues had been experienced, the lessons, which could have been learned, had not always been carried forward into policy amendment.

5.13　Where monitoring had been put in place, there was no clear objective behind it. Substantial and significant information was available, but not used. Questionnaire answers indicated that the first retained woman firefighter was appointed 24 years ago, with the first wholetime woman firefighter being appointed 17 years ago. The number of women appointed since then has been low. Twenty brigades stated that each of the originally recruited retained women appointed was still serving; and 39 reported the same situation for women appointed as wholetime firefighters. In the absence of effective monitoring of retention found by the inspection team, such claims are likely to be based on local knowledge. This leads to some concerns about the reliability of these statistics. Some of the data in the replies to questionnaires was at variance with that provided for the Fire Service Equal Opportunities Statistics Report.

5.14　Other questionnaire responses in respect of the collection of information to monitor recruitment, training, promotion, grievances, or reasons for leaving, showed a wide variation in practice between brigades. A high proportion said that they carried out no monitoring at all, and where it was stated that monitoring was taking place, most of it related to recruitment. The disparity between brigades, and the lack of any real or effective monitoring, was confirmed by the inspection. Where monitoring was encountered, it was little more than the simple recording of numbers. No useful analysis of data appears to be taking place; nor indeed would it seem possible in these circumstances.

6   Culture

6.1   The previous sections on leadership and policy have already set out a number of issues which indicate that the service's culture is in need of change. This section seeks to emphasise the need for that change. Many within the fire service community already recognise this need. **We therefore urge those in a position to bring about the change, to take this forward as a matter of urgency.**

Background

6.2   The service, since its modern inception in 1947, has developed a powerful internal identity. This has grown out of its early connections with the Royal Navy which resulted in a military style supported by a strong discipline code, and enforced by formal discipline regulations. This is accompanied by an almost 'regimental' pride, and a spirit of team working, which is essential to the operational role of the service. This ethos, and a strong spirit of service, pervades the fire service at both local and national levels. Externally, the service's image is very much an 'action orientated' one. Exceptionally high levels of satisfaction and support are reported from the public at large although the broader role of members of the service is often not appreciated. The day to day mission of the service in protection of the community requires skill, courage and tenacity of the highest order. These attributes are all recognised by the public.

6.3   The internal management of the service, however, is in sharp contrast to its external image. The reaction and discipline essential to front line operations, which occupy only a small part of the service's time overall, has scant application to the routine day to day working. Yet it is retained as an element of 'command' power across activities that require leadership and management, rather than automatic obedience to orders.

6.4   At fire station level staff are very closely knit. There, a closed group on a 'watch' (shift) takes on the character of a family rather than a team. The watch duty system applied to achieve the maintenance of 24-hour availability, currently contains long periods of 'stand-by', so that watch members live together as much as they work together. The members of these 'families' stay as an entity, to the extent that in some cases, individuals may serve on the same station, on the same watch, for their whole career. As in families, the relationships between members of watches have tensions involving power, precedence, and unwritten rules.

6.5   Entry to the service is single tier, with all officers joining initially as firefighters. All have therefore been part of the watch culture, which they have to leave in order to achieve advancement. This advancement is as much based on experience as on qualifications.

6.6   The strength of the watch culture is such that those who are promoted onto a new watch or those who leave their own watch for further promotion are unlikely to challenge the culture. This has developed a whole-time service that appears to operate in different 'streams' with fire-fighters who decide not to pursue advancement continuing to serve at that level, and with experienced watch members often taking a lead which may be detrimental to the role of junior officers. Others achieve promotion to leadership roles, on the watch or in specialist references. A number of other 'streams' apply to those seeking advancement to more senior positions. The divisions and differences are reinforced by varying duty systems and the different conditions of service under which they serve.

6.7   These inherently hierarchical characteristics are divisive and conspire to divorce the officers from their firefighters. They also discourage personal 'investment' by these developing officers towards achieving change, so reinforcing the negative aspects of the closed watch culture.

6.8   The culture can encourage an 'us and them' mentality. This is most evident in the relationships between members of the service who wear uniform and those who do not. It also exists between specialist departments within the uniformed service. The relationship between wholetime staff and their retained colleagues are often particularly strained. This closed organisation effect is exaggerated by a 'macho' culture that requires 'laddish' behaviour and male bonding, characterised by a requirement to 'fit in'.

6.9   There is little doubt that the majority of the members of the service are comfortable with its culture, seeing most of the characteristics as strengths. The implications of this are serious, since the continuation of this sort of image to the outside world is unlikely to attract a diverse workforce, or enable the closer relationships that will be necessary in all communities, to advance community fire safety. It will also become increasingly unacceptable to the public within the community at large.

The Effects of Uniform

6.10   The hierarchical structure is reinforced by the use of uniform. This is clearly essential to many aspects of the work of the service, notably where its members are in direct contact with the public. The actual manifestation of 'uniform' was however perplexing. While its use is embedded within the service, the variation in types of clothing used under this category between individuals, groups and levels of staff within brigades is actually inconsistent with the concept of a uniform. A number of brigades provided a simple working uniform for some operational staff. The benefit of this approach was somewhat negated, however, by providing different wear for officers on the same shift, or for equivalent ranks on other types of duty. In every case senior officers, that is everyone other than those conditioned

to the watch related duty system, continued to wear a formal style of uniform, similar to that used by the police service. The differences between the type of uniform worn and its use, were even greater when compared across brigades. There is now, however, a widely held view within brigades that a return to a consistent approach on uniform is now a priority.

6.11   Irrespective of the logic behind these arrangements, there is an important point to make about the significance of uniform in reinforcing a militaristic culture within the fire service and the messages that it can convey. In many or most brigades today, it appears to reinforce hierarchical differences or elitism rather than to assure a corporate identity. This is holding brigades back from projecting an image for the twenty first century which is appropriate to the wishes of the community, and acceptable to those serving within the service.

6.12   The use of uniform in this way does not fit comfortably with the wishes and aspirations of the majority of the workforce today.   Its application is at best variable and is inconsistent with normal informal working practice in the closed teams already described. Throughout the inspections the team endeavoured to achieve the maximum dialogue with the minimum of formality. Despite this intention, uniformed staff often 'paraded' for our discussions. Once this artificial expectation was broken down, however, the overwhelming majority adopted a much more natural style with the team.

6.13   The effect of all these characteristics in seeking to achieve a well balanced, modern working environment in which equality and fairness can flourish was very negative. Many individuals were reasonable, aware and informed, with a natural instinct for equality and fairness issues. Others were attracted to fairness and spoke strongly in its favour, but the focus of that fairness was very narrow. In a surprisingly high number of cases comments, often forcibly made, indicated a narrow self- centred view, which was totally incompatible with the achievement of equality and fairness. Even these individuals had a very clear focus on service delivery to the public, but converted this belief into a reason for the maintenance of the existing white male dominated organisation, in order to guard against the 'dropping of standards'.

Recognition of Non Uniformed Staff

6.14   The inspection revealed deep underlying concerns on the part of non uniformed members of brigades in respect of their status and role within the organisation. Generally they felt undervalued. The uniformed element, however, used them to carry out highly important specialist roles which they, themselves, could not, or would not wish to perform. On the other hand it was common practice to use highly graded uniformed staff to head sections of staff with

specialisations and qualifications, in which that officer had limited previous expertise. Not only did this cause disruption while the officer learned the basic elements of the job, but the effect was to limit drastically the opportunity for advancement in the service for other than uniformed officers.

6.15 Instead of seeing the greater involvement and recognition of non uniformed staff as a means of enriching the capability and capacity of the service, any extension of their use was limited to reducing costs as a result of their substantially lower pay and inferior overall conditions of service. The effect of this is that uniformed leadership, fed from a single tier of development of officers, creates an 'us and them' culture. This is perpetuated by the substantial differences in conditions of service. The sustainability of this approach in the light of the high dependence of the service on non-uniformed staff is questionable.

Women Firefighters

6.16 **The overwhelming collective view of uniformed staff, including many officers interviewed during the inspection, was strong opposition to women being employed in the operational fire service.** Many reasons were given, but the overriding view was that women were not capable of doing 'a man's job'. There were also genuine, if misconceived, concerns for their welfare and health in the longer term. Other beliefs, strongly voiced and consistently found throughout, were not based on such good intentions. The motivation of women who wished to join was questioned. Their intentions were either to win major settlements through false claims against discrimination, or to steal husbands! Many firefighters freely admitted that their wives or girl friends would not allow them to work with women.

6.17 The lack of facilities for women was also given as a fundamental bar to their being able to join the service. It was believed that no woman could be strong enough, or fit enough, to meet the requirements of the job. This belief was directly linked to the certainty that standards are being dropped in order to allow women to join and remain in the service. A whole range of local and nationally shared anecdotes was used to support these beliefs.

6.18 In spite of all the doubts expressed, members of watches or officers who had worked with women, were generally more relaxed about the idea, as well as being very supportive of the individuals. Nevertheless, even in these cases, the woman who was accepted as a firefighter colleague, was seen as the exception that proved the rule. We also encountered women who, having gained that acceptance, were themselves opposed to increasing women membership of the service.

6.19 Those women who had been assimilated into the service were credited with the ability of being able to 'fit in'. This 'fitting in' with the dominant culture was

almost universally seen as the principal requirement for everybody in the service. In a few instances the need to do so had resulted in women adopting a role that made their gender 'invisible'. This approach seemed to meet the expectations of many male firefighters. **In contrast, we also met long serving women who, through a range of approaches, had been able to become accepted and indeed respected for what they were and what they brought to the job.**

6.20   It is notable that the questionnaire returns indicate that about half of all chief fire officers believe that the workforce readily accepts women firefighters into their brigades on their merits. This suggests a lack of appreciation of the true situation, if the strength of opposition to women firefighters met by the inspection team is representative of the service as a whole. And, in our view, those chief officers who think women will be readily accepted display a lack of understanding of the issues when explaining the reasons for that acceptance.

Sexual Harassment

6.21   There were reports of sexual harassment in all the brigades visited. This ranged from allegations of what has become to be seen as 'routine' harassment not specifically directed at individuals, such as men urinating over the floor and toilet rolls in the women's toilet, or the display of pornographic videos at fire stations, to allegations of more serious harassment in some brigades. These included exposure, touching and assault that had had catastrophic effects on the women concerned. Some brigades had been found guilty of sexual harassment at employment tribunal hearings and had paid significant sums in compensation. The incidence of sexual harassment was frequently rationalised by firefighters and senior officers on the basis that often the women were not up to the rigours of the job**. All the women who had taken cases to employment tribunals had left the service.**

6.22   It was a matter of great concern to learn of the pressures faced by most, but not all, the women we met in the process of joining, during their training and subsequently in service. **The extent of the coping mechanisms, explained by these members of the service, would not be acceptable to any reasonable person, and were a matter of extreme concern to the inspection team.**

Black and Ethnic Minority Firefighters

6.23   **The opinions of all the people we spoke to were rather more balanced in respect of the right of men from the black and ethnic minority communities to join the service.** This was encouraging in principle and appeared to be the genuine belief of those who expressed it. Although this immediate response was more moderate than was found in respect of views about women, the more detailed discussions revealed some real concerns here too.

6.24   We have no reason to doubt that what was so reliably expressed to us was sincerely felt, but the understanding of the majority of the workforce of the issues relating to diversity, was not found to bear out that good intention. We rarely encountered open racism, although there were some exceptions. The vast majority of staff expressed no antagonistic views or feelings about people from the black and ethnic communities joining the service. Although there was this spoken acceptance, there was also an inherent proviso that this should not be allowed to let 'standards' drop, as if the two issues were directly linked.

6.25   There was a marked lack of understanding of the need for diversity in the service, and of the issues that need to be addressed to achieve diversity. As a consequence, it is difficult to believe that those positive opinions would be reflected in the experiences of those in the black and ethnic minority. The difference in the behaviour of some of the black and ethnic minority firefighters when in the company of white colleagues, compared with their responses in private, serves to emphasise that real tensions exist.

6.26   Members of the Black and Ethnic Minority Members Group of the Fire Brigades Union told us of the real difficulty faced by many of their members, as a result of the conscious and unconscious actions of white male colleagues. Inappropriate humour and language also caused offence. They remain critical of the apparent lack of commitment of management at all levels to ensure that policies and procedures were followed, or that people were treated in a proper manner. There was also strong opposition within the workforce to any form of positive action to encourage members of ethnic minority communities to join the service. Neither was there evidence of any understanding of the reasons for these initiatives or of the need for them.

6.27   These reservations were strongly supported in discussion with black and ethnic minority staff in brigades, as well as in discussions at the national level with the Black Ethnic and Minority Members Group of the Fire Brigades Union. As with women, black and ethnic staff had coped with all sorts of difficulty, sometimes as a result of open racism, but predominantly due to ignorance on the part of white male colleagues. **Again, acceptance was conditional on 'fitting in', with no account being taken of the background, traditions or preferences of individuals.**

6.28   Our discussions with groups of black and ethnic minority firefighters and with individual members produced a worrying range of comments such as the actual examples set out here:

- You have to fit in, you can't be yourself.
- I have had swinging doors pushed into my face. You have to stand up for yourself, you can't be intimidated.
- At my exit interview I told a senior manager of my experiences. They tried to minimise it and I'm sure nothing was done.
- I was told "I've been doing it this way for twenty years, I'm not going to change for you".
- Brigade management would take any issue you reported out of your hands and blow it up out of all proportion. Then it creates an 'us and them' situation with your colleagues.
- I tolerate much more than I would outside the fire service.
- Name-calling is routine but not serious.
- If we fail it is because of our colour, if we succeed it is by oneself.
- Turn out sheet today said the location "was near the Paki shop".
- I feel comfortable on my watch but there are watches I wouldn't want to go to.
- You just let most of the blatant low level jokes go.
- Complaints would be dissipated at middle manager level, so I don't bother.
- Serving officers have called me "nigger" to my face. The last time was 14 months ago by a senior officer at H Q.
- I apply for lots of jobs but don't get them.
- Managers talk and talk but aren't prepared to walk the talk.

Sexuality

6.29   The subject of sexuality is an absolute taboo to most members of the service. In this area there was no understanding of the issues, nor any preparedness to contemplate them. The fact that many of those we spoke to were unaware of any gay or lesbian members among the workforce indicates the fear that exists in respect of declaring sexuality within the service.

6.30   During brigade inspections we encountered very few members of the gay and lesbian community who were prepared to raise the issues of sexuality in open discussion. Fortunately, a few individuals, sometimes supported by brigade management, did feel able to share their experiences with us, putting the Gay and Lesbian Support Group of the Fire Brigades Union in contact with our inspection team. In our meeting with their national committee we discussed the experiences of all their members, and their efforts to gain service wide recognition. Their sexuality does need to be accepted as much in the fire service as it is in society at large.

6.31   The support group, since its incorporation into the Fire Brigades Union as a recognised section of membership, had sought to advance knowledge and understanding of the nature of sexuality within the service. This has been attempted both by providing information and by encouraging discussion of the issues that need to be addressed.

6.32   They continue to face extreme opposition, indeed vilification, from a vociferous few supported by fear, misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge from the ill-informed majority. They acknowledged that the more recently appointed, younger staff had a more balanced approach, but were concerned about the opinion forming power of middle aged, middle ranking officers, whose conditioning did not allow them to contemplate or acknowledge life styles different to their own experiences or conventions. The committee members were more positive about some of the more senior officers. They were however concerned that correspondence introducing chief officers to the existence of the support group and asking for information on the support or protection to members of the gay and lesbian community within the service, had not received a reply from more than half the brigades in the country.

6.33   They shared with us that as a group they found it unsafe to recommend to gay and lesbian members of the service that they should be open about their sexuality in the working environment, because of the inherent hostility that exists. More positively, they could report that there were good examples of tolerance, acceptance and even support, where individuals have been able to satisfy colleagues of their credibility and disabuse them of fears or concerns. In other cases, revelation of non-heterosexual orientation had been disastrous. In the worst examples, this had led to the need to resign from the service.

6.34   The group, which consists of about 150 members of the service who have declared their sexuality, is aware of as many as four times that number who are not prepared to 'come out' because of their fears of discrimination and recrimination. Clearly their sexuality is an issue that does need to be recognised within the service in numerical terms. There is representation in the group from every brigade in the country. The fear of being open with close working colleagues is a further negative outcome of a predominantly white heterosexual culture.

6.35   Unlike issues of gender, race or disability, those of sexuality do not enjoy the support of legislation to ensure protection in the workplace, or enforce equality and fairness for those who are not of the majority. The group was therefore most anxious that brigades should provide this protection, through their policies and orders. The questionnaire shows that 43 brigades include the issue of sexuality in their policies. It was not possible to ascertain the quality or effect of those inclusions. The group was equally concerned about ignorance of health

implications of AIDS and HIV and lack of brigade policies dealing with this aspect for all in the service. This was a major omission, not only because of the important health implications, but also because this ignorance impacted particularly badly on members of the gay and lesbian community, since many ill-informed people believe that these conditions originate in those communities.

The Implications of Culture

6.36   In reporting these disappointing aspects of our findings, it is important to emphasise that all the discussions and/or interviews followed a clear description of the purpose of our visit and the thematic review. This is significant in that it confirms the strength of the views expressed and the extent to which individuals and groups, other than those from minorities, appear to be out of tune with the realities of these issues. It also underwrites the scale of the task of those within the service who are set upon achieving meaningful improvements.

6.37   This extended discussion on elements of the culture seen and experienced throughout the brigades inspected has been set out in order to explain the extent of our concern with what we found in the fire service environment in which it is hoped that equality and fairness will flourish. The chapter on conclusions - sections 14 to 23 - puts great emphasis on the need for major changes in this area to enable the achievement of that success by everyone committed to it.

7   Understanding of the Need for Equality and Fairness

7.1   Throughout the inspections, discussion revealed an absence of appreciation, at any but the highest levels, of the benefits which would accrue to the service and the community from advancement of equality and fairness in the fire service.

7.2   The only focus recognised, was the need to respond to political and governmental initiatives relating to racial or gender equality. There was little appreciation of the application of fairness across the whole of the service and indeed society. Any drive in this direction was often therefore seen as little more than 'political correctness'. There was little consideration of the overriding moral and social imperatives, or of the benefits to service delivery which would result. It was disappointing too that a substantial number of staff did not appreciate the legislative requirements, either in terms of their personal responsibilities or indeed their rights.

7.3   Although some officers were quick to recognise the need for the service to reflect our multicultural society, staff on fire stations needed to be pressed to acknowledge this. It was even more difficult to achieve any recognition of the benefits of a diverse workforce. The predominant view of staff at almost all levels was that the traditional approaches, which had resulted in the existing membership of the service, had proved their worth. This was linked to a strong opposition to any form of positive action, which was seen as unnecessary, and both objectionable and unacceptable in the context of fairness. This deeply entrenched view seemed to stem from a belief that the small number of people that constitute the majority in the fire service has a right to maintain its own secure position irrespective of the needs of others in society.

7.4   Other benefits of a more representative workforce were rarely envisaged. These could be improvements in job satisfaction; the avoidance of damaging legal action resulting from discrimination; or the potential to make a more meaningful impact with community fire safety initiatives. There was a worrying inability to recognise that the service would appear increasingly outmoded in a diverse population and little appreciation of any possibility of the kinds of tension that can arise in polarised communities. This characteristic applied as much in brigades that had had to deal with riots and outbreaks of civil unrest in the past, as those that had not.

7.5   It was noted, however, that **in some brigades there appeared to be a regime of recrimination in the event of failure to meet the management's policy requirements on equality issues. This was contributing to an atmosphere of concern, and even fear. This was unfortunate since it**

originated from inadequate training and understanding. This sort of difficulty is contributing to the negative responses from many staff.

Language

7.6   During our inspections, the use of 'language' was frequently, albeit often unintentionally, offensive. Understanding of the implications of language was frequently extremely inadequate and some very senior officers were also at fault.   In some instances the failings were actually difficult to believe. There are training needs in this area, but the lack of understanding and ignorance displayed by some in the service is unacceptable and is a matter of real concern. Examples regularly encountered included descriptions such as 'girls'; 'lasses' or 'ladies' in respect of women firefighters, or 'coloureds', 'ethnics' or 'negroes' for black or ethnic minority firefighters. Sadly a few staff openly used even more offensive language. The effect is that the fire service will increasingly appear dated, out of touch, unapproachable and uninterested. This reinforces differences. Language mirrors culture and must present difficulty in dealing with people, particularly as the brigades become more involved within their communities.

7.7   Some members of authorities also used unfortunate language. The fact that even this element of appreciation had not been achieved, even where training had been provided, must cause concern and indicate the need for a substantial change in approach.

7.8   A much more positive and well-informed attitude overall, was encountered on a few watches and with a substantial proportion of officers. In these cases it was clear that local leadership, both formal through the supervisors, or informally from strong individuals, had developed these balanced views.

7.9   The inspection team was particularly struck by a strange contradiction that applied in all the brigades. Despite the fact that a compliance ethos existed in respect of all other orders and instructions, **in the case of those relating to equality and fairness, staff firmly believed that they had the right to choose the extent to which they would comply.** This choice appeared to be applied solely on the basis of their personal, individual judgement. It was not clear why this was allowed but it must send a message in respect of the approach of management, to equality and fairness, that this is allowed to persist.

8 Recruitment

8.1 Since the fire service currently has such a low representation of members of the black and ethnic communities and of women, it is essential to ensure that the recruitment process is non-discriminatory. On the basis of all that we saw during our inspections, we were not satisfied that this is the case.

Non Uniformed Staff

8.2 The service employs a significant number of non-uniformed staff in addition to the uniformed workforce. While in this category there are more women employees, with the exception of one large brigade, the position for members of the black and ethnic minority community is little better than is the case with uniformed staff. Where representation was more balanced, it was disappointing to note that these staff were predominantly in the more junior grades. Although some might view non-uniformed staff as being not of such a high profile, this in itself is a questionable attitude. In any event, it is just as important that the principles underlying the main thrust of this section are carried through into this part of the service. This is essential to enable a more suitable representation and to allow the subsequent development of improved retention, together with promotion arrangements that enable black and ethnic minority people and women to achieve their full potential. **On the basis of current statistics and our findings during the inspections, many brigades need to give this area much greater attention.**

Wholetime Uniformed Staff

8.3 The arrangements for recruitment into the wholetime uniformed service was a particular focus during the inspections. Our findings here were a matter of considerable concern. The existing arrangements for monitoring applicants for appointment in most of the brigades inspected were not robust enough to allow a substantiated view to be taken of the numbers of applications received, progression of applicants through recruiting procedures, or their success. The information available in those brigades that had reasonable monitoring data indicates that applications from people in black and ethnic minority communities is not representative of the proportion of those people in the brigade area. It also shows that the proportion of applicants that are successful in the procedure are in turn not equivalent to that achieved by white men.

8.4 The applications from women and their progress towards appointment follow the same pattern, although the relationship did vary between brigades. In one recent example in one brigade, 87 applications were received from people of black or ethnic minority origin, with 90 coming from women. **None of these applicants was successful**. This outcome was unfortunate since it followed a 'positive **action'**

recruiting campaign aimed at encouraging applications from these groups. The reasons for failure were mixed, with failures at the application form stage being significant for both women and men. In the case of women, those who progressed further than consideration of applications failed the physical tests.

8.5 It is necessary to set out the background to the recruiting position in the service since it has had a bearing on many of the practices that are currently in place. For many years, the service has been in the fortunate position of being able to attract a very large number of candidates. Nationally, based on the returns to our questionnaire, the number of applications compared to vacancies, averages at a factor in excess of 160 to1.

8.6 The number of applications received has increased over recent years as brigades have ensured that all vacancies are openly advertised. Previously more than enough applicants were available from ongoing enquiries and waiting lists, a process that certainly has had an adverse effect on equality of opportunity. The change to more appropriate methods has created some difficulty. It has increased the administrative workload in handling the applications and, at the same time, has prevented full and fair consideration of potentially suitable candidates because of the large numbers needing to be considered. Given the demands on generally small personnel departments, it is perhaps not surprising to find that on occasions sift criteria are drawn up in order to reduce the numbers of applications which need to be considered further. Sometimes the reason for exclusion is wholly trivial. In others, selection criteria such as specific qualifications or skills not included in the national guidance, are used.

8.7 The initial arrangements for making applications varied considerably. In some cases application forms were held on fire stations and could be handed out to callers without any monitoring or follow up facility. At the other extreme a 'first come, first served' competition to obtain an application form applied. This acted as a control on the number of application forms that needed to be processed, with the maximum number of application forms issued being limited.

8.8 Once candidates have obtained an application form and are selected for further consideration, the breadth of testing and the application of arbitrary (even if potentially useful) criteria, are enormous. Examples of these points are set out in the questionnaire included at appendix A. (see Q.8.5 and Q.8.6). These local criteria, supported in some cases by ad-hoc setting of pass marks and lack of monitoring of outcomes, are as much directed at de-selection as selection. In some cases random selection of applicants is still in use. All of these variations lead to a lack of equality of opportunity and the ability to monitor, undermining the application of positive action.

Positive Action

8.9   Some good 'positive action' initiatives were noted in several of the brigades inspected. These included targeted advertisements, access events, information packs on the tests and on the selection procedures, with help and advice being made available. Nationally, the majority of brigades include special mention of their wish to attract more women and black and ethnic people in their recruitment advertising. The relatively small number of recruits appointed in most brigades and the infrequent recruitment pattern has, however, made it difficult to carry out regular positive action initiatives. This limits the 'announcement' effect of significant and real commitment in this respect. In some brigades the very small numbers of recruits (68% of brigades recruited an average of less than 20 firefighters per annum, over the last five years), restricts the opportunity of many potential candidates. This applies both to planning for a fire service career and to the possibility of even seeing the limited advertising for so few posts. There is a widespread misunderstanding of the meaning of positive action both within the workforce and management.

8.10   Although not a legal requirement, positive measures are permitted under sections 47 and 48 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and sections 37 and 38 of the Race Relations Act 1976, in order to encourage potential employees from groups that are underrepresented in an organisation to take advantage of opportunities for employment. Positive action can be used to counteract the organisational effects of past discrimination and help eliminate the continuing stereotyping of jobs in the workplace.

8.11   A sex or race is held to be "under-represented" in an organisation when few or no people of one sex or race have been employed in a particular job during the preceding 12 months. This can mean either that there was none of that group doing a particular job, or that there were disproportionately few in comparison with the group's proportion in the workforce, or in the population from which the employer usually recruits.

8.12   In such circumstances an employer may advertise vacancies aimed at attracting applicants from a particular group, or may run training courses for people from the underrepresented groups in order to help them compete on a level playing field with others in the selection process. Selection to the post must not be on the grounds of sex or race.

Advertising

8.13   There is no co-ordination of recruitment or advertising of vacancies between brigades, although it is known that this is being considered in some parts of the country. This effectively means that the chance of any applicant being aware of

vacancies other than those advertised in the local press is very slight. The comparatively small catchment area of local advertising media, together with equivalent boundaries for brigades, mean that potential applicants in close proximity may well be unaware of opportunities to join the service in, say, the nearest town to where they live.

8.14   The particular type of media used for local advertisement also varies. In one brigade, targeted radio advertising on ethnic community radio was tried, but newspaper advertisements are most commonly used.

8.15   The choice of which types of newspapers to use was inconsistent. Where black and ethnic minority community papers exist they are frequently utilised by brigades, although this isolated use did not appear to be very successful. General advertising was sometimes limited to 'free' local newspapers, since this form is substantially less expensive than conventional papers. In other cases, selection was made from the range available in the brigade area. Some brigades maintained waiting lists for the notification of vacancies. In others, interested enquirers are simply told to watch for advertisements as they occurred. One brigade advertised set hours during which requests for application forms could be made through a dedicated phone line. This time and number limited system was the only means available to obtain forms, although people who attended positive action events were able to obtain forms. The lack of consistency throughout poses questions about the fairness of access for <u>all</u> applicants, particularly as the recruitment process is so competitive.

'Serial' Applicants

8.16   We were told that particularly determined, or perhaps well informed, applicants contact brigades throughout the country to ensure that they know when recruiting is to take place. They then pursue vacancies nationally, sometimes failing the requirements in several different brigades, but eventually being successful. Not only is this an additional load on an already stretched recruitment process, but it also may be causing an imbalance in the type of applicant reaching the test stages. It should be a cause for concern that candidates can fail consistently, yet still eventually gain appointment in a brigade. It is worthy of note that firefighters were of the view that the type of candidate who would follow this course, or gain appointment after multiple applications in a single brigade, was the preferred type of recruit. **This philosophy contributed to the opposition to forms of positive action, since it was seen that any worthy applicant should struggle their way into the service to prove their commitment.**

8.17   In at least one brigade a particular difficulty has been encountered in retaining the staff recruited. The cost of living in its area is such that applicants

from other parts of the country apply and are selected for appointment on the basis of suitability for the job, only to seek and often achieve transfer to their 'home' brigade after training. The financial and operational effect of this over time has led to the introduction of a scheme for repayment of training and induction costs from applicants who transfer within defined periods. The brigade hopes that this will reduce the implications of open advertising in future. In any event there is reason to be concerned that serial applicants may be overwhelming the effects of local positive action initiatives.

Recruiting Standards

8.18   Despite national guidance developed through consultative procedures, we encountered a plethora of local recruitment 'standards' in use in the brigades inspected. The local arrangements we examined had not been tested against criteria to ensure avoidance of discrimination on the grounds of either race or gender, nor were they fair to the full range of potential applicants.

8.19   The service does not yet have a nationally accepted job specification for firefighters, nor is there a corresponding person specification. This is despite extended discussion and consultation over many years. It follows that the simple statutory criteria set down for appointment, as underpinned by current guidance, does not today meet the needs of the service. There has therefore been some practical justification in brigades seeking to improve upon inadequate advice. The breadth of these variations and their inconsistency, however, cannot be acceptable and they are likely to lead to unlawful discrimination.

8.20   Recently published work on the provision of a detailed 'role map' setting out the characteristics and skills required of a firefighter, to be supported by nationally recognised competencies, will enable the publication of a proper job description and person specification. This will be a positive development in support of the selection criteria for the future.

Medical and Physical Standards

8.21   More inconsistency arises at the stage of assessment of medical standards and physical aptitude. Again, existing agreed national standards are supplemented or upgraded in individual brigades, invariably increasing the strength or endurance standard required. This approach, founded on no more than local belief, has a direct effect on the ability of women to pass this stage of the recruitment procedure. It can also have a similarly detrimental effect on applicants from some ethnic minority groups. Only one brigade of those inspected, recruited solely on the basis of national guidance. Again, discussion and consultation on this issue is of long standing, but is yet to be resolved, despite its crucial importance to the service.

8.22   The extent to which physical standards and their testing, predominates in the selection process, is a matter of further concern. There is no doubt that the firefighters job requires a high level of medical fitness and that all who join the operational service need to develop and maintain physical fitness. It is difficult to understand why once medical fitness, (to accord to a job researched and related national standard) has been confirmed, it is a prerequisite that the candidate should meet the full physical fitness requirement at the time of initial application. It seems that while it can be accepted that a successful applicant can be trained and developed to meet all the other requirements of the job during the recruit training course and subsequent probationary service, the development of full physical fitness cannot be dealt with in the same way.

8.23   Of all the criteria applied in the selection procedure, the standard of physical fitness has the most significant influence on the ability of candidates to pass through to final testing and interview. Whether by intention or otherwise, this aspect acts as a principal device for de-selection in all the brigades inspected. With one exception, scant attention appears to be paid in the recruitment process to the overall social or communication skills of applicants; all rely heavily on demonstrating physical prowess. Given the increasing importance of community safety programmes it is surprising that a wider range of skills is not given such high importance during recruitment.

8.24   This apparent fixation with absolute physical standards on entry is in sharp contrast to an acceptance, held through a wide range of staff in the brigades, that there was no place for any level of recognised educational qualification as a criterion for selection into the service. This appears somewhat illogical in a service that maintains a single tier entry system to provide for all of its officer, managerial and specialist needs. There are implications for equality and fairness as a result of these characteristics. There are also implications in respect of attracting the type of workforce and the leadership the service will need in the future. The dangers of potential discrimination in setting any arbitrary level of educational qualification are clear, but the absence of professionally developed and validated ability range tests based on a proper 'job needs' analysis, is a surprising omission, particularly since a considerable commitment has been made to achieving this over many years.

Interviews

8.25   Irrespective of the testing procedures carried out in each brigade inspected, all the recruitment procedures included a formal interview as the final determinant of successful or unsuccessful candidates. The form of these interviews varied. In some cases an individual officer undertook the interview, in others, a panel. The specialisation of the individuals on the panels was different between brigades, with levels of training in equality issues varying considerably from experts, to those who

had received no special training. The importance of this final interview was recognised, and some brigades had good procedures in place. The commitment on the part of elected members to appointment processes, varied in each brigade in terms of the levels of involvement. In all cases they are responsible for the appointment of the most senior staff. Although many of the members consulted had received some training in interviewing, often in other organisations, others had to rely on experience and good intention. **In view of the importance of this selection we were concerned that the inconsistency of training was a serious omission.**

Recruit Training

8.26   Recruit training courses were not examined in detail within this thematic review, other than when encountered on a visit to a training centre and when raised in other discussions. The arrangements in each brigade for this training varied, with some providing their own and others using courses run by other brigades. Most courses are residential. Emphasis is given to the need for this, on the grounds that it is necessary for recruits to have the experience of living and working together.   It is also possible to assess them for their ability to adapt to this life style. In other brigades, positive decisions have been taken to remove this residential element, since its effects could be to deter applicants with certain family or carer responsibilities. This approach does, however, present practical difficulty where recruits have to travel long distances to training centres in other brigades. In any event, the facilities at training centres, in respect of suitable arrangements for women were also inconsistent.

8.27   Work to revise and provide a relevant national training syllabus has continued over many years, but its completion is still outstanding, due to the development of role maps and a competency based training regime. There are recognised differences in the recruit training provided in the centres which provide these courses, both in respect of content and the approach to its provision. We were repeatedly assured that considerable attention has been paid to removing former manifestations of an excessively disciplined, 'make-or-break' regime in these centres and that proper consideration was being given to removing potentially discriminatory testing and assessment from this important training. The views of some recruits supported this, although there were marked concerns voiced by others based on their own experiences.

Retained Recruitment

8.28   The locally based retained service places considerable dependence on the community it serves. It must obtain its recruits and achieve release of those firefighters who were in full time employment to respond to fire and other

emergency call outs. There are tight and necessary restrictions on the residential and working locations of those who can join the service and this inevitably limits the proportion of people in any community who can be appointed. There are considerable difficulties in recruiting and retaining members of the service since location and availability is given high importance. In many instances the practical need to maintain fire cover is achieved through the efforts of the local crew.

8.29   As in the wholetime service, great dependence is placed on commitment to the 'service ethic' and the maintenance of the 'team', with the local station commander having a pivotal role in making the station available throughout the year. Traditionally, local contacts and introductions have been the major source of recruitment. In many brigades this is supported by centrally managed recruitment campaigns and advertising, but in discussion with the staff on the stations we visited, it was clear that the ability of a potential recruit to 'fit in' was seen as most important.

8.30   There were mixed views about the role of women in the retained service. Some staff are very positive, recognising the benefits to the station on which they served, both in representing the community and in ensuring the maintenance of fire cover as a result of the availability they could offer. There was also recognition that women brought a new dimension to the service. In other cases, there was opposition to both the concept and the practicalities with the full range of prejudices expounded by wholetime opponents. Where opposition was encountered it appeared to be a 'station' view to which all staff subscribed, including officers. It was clear in these cases that there was little or no chance of women being encouraged to apply to join the service or of being attracted to do so in the first place.

8.31   In discussion with individual women retained members and with their representatives, we were made aware of similar difficulties to those being faced by women in the wholetime service. The closed nature of the local station and its independence make those who are retained feel even more isolated. There was therefore even more pressure to 'fit in' than in the case of their wholetime colleagues.

8.32   Although the numbers are still comparatively small, it is notable that in 1998 there were as many women employed in the retained service in England and Wales as in the wholetime service. This comment is in the context of a wholetime establishment which is three times larger.   By contrast, there are very few black and ethnic minority people in the retained service, in fact only 54 in the whole service. Our discussions revealed there was no apparent prejudice against applicants or serving members from these communities. Other messages, however, such as the use of language and the lack of knowledge about the issues or individual rights and

responsibilities, were not so encouraging. The case has been made, strongly in some brigades, that the nature of the communities served by retained stations is such that there are unlikely to be large numbers of black and ethnic minority people in residence or available for fire cover. The very small number employed at present cannot, however, be accepted as truly representative. It is just as important to have diversity in the retained service, for all the service delivery and social reasons already outlined.

8.33   A specific area of potential discrimination in selection to the wholetime service emanates from the standing of retained firefighters. These publicly spirited 'volunteers' join the local retained stations on a part-time employment basis and in doing so are required to pass a number of the tests applicable to wholetime firefighters. Not infrequently they then wish to pursue a professional career in the service and make application accordingly. In recognition of their commitment and acquired skills, it is the practice in some brigades, at least six according to our questionnaire, to afford a level of preference to these candidates. They usually pass them automatically, to a later stage in the process. Although well intentioned, this appears to be discriminatory.

8.34   We were also informed that a group of brigades was seriously considering instituting a standard process to enable retained staff to fill any wholetime vacancies, on application. This was on the basis that they were already employed and meeting the requirements of the job. Bearing in mind the absolute link between the need to reside close to a retained fire station and be available to respond to fire calls, the limitation this would place on equal opportunity is unacceptable. This is only one example of how easily good intent can detract from a proper consideration of the need to ensure equality and fairness.

Targets for Recruitment from Under Represented groups

8.35   During the period of this review the Home Secretary has issued targets for each brigade to achieve in its recruitment of members of the black and ethnic communities. The objective of this initiative is to encourage a representation within the brigade workforce that reflects the community it serves. During the consultation process, the majority of senior officers in the brigades inspected supported the initiative, with many making a clear commitment to it.   A few, however, pointed out potential difficulties, while a small number did not think the approach should apply in their case, or was inappropriate. **Many brigades have already engaged the full support of members of their fire authority in setting their targets and putting in place plans and processes to ensure that they will succeed in achieving the targets and the changes which support them.**

8.36   This overwhelmingly positive leadership approach to dealing with targets is in sharp contrast with the views of staff, both on fire stations and in supervisory positions. We found an almost universal inability to recognise the benefit of having a diverse workforce, either for the brigade or for society at large. As in the case of positive action initiatives, any attempt to encourage or enable an improvement in representation from any group through target setting is viewed very negatively and in itself unfair. **The difference between targets and quotas was not understood.** The inspection team was most concerned about the strength of the opposition. It is clear that many of those who will be undertaking recruitments and supporting that process, are among those who expound these views.

8.37   The Home Secretary is also supportive of the concept of setting targets for women to be recruited into the service. This issue is being examined at present, but is unlikely to be finally resolved by the time this report is published. Again, the principle is already being grasped by some fire authorities, although it is questionable that the workforce will be any more supportive of this than for target setting for recruitment of members of the black and ethnic minority communities.

8.38   The data currently available shows that in only three brigades does ethnic minority representation reflect the proportion of the local population. The majority of brigades will be faced with major challenges in achieving the targets set. Due account has been taken of this in that the targets have realistic time scales. On the basis of the level of preparedness for this initiative in most of the brigades inspected, however, urgent attention to community support and involvement and positive attitude changes, together with revised advertising and recruiting matters, will need immediate attention. This is of particular importance in view of the substantial peak in recruitment that is predicted to occur in the earlier part of the ten-year target period. This peak results from the retirement of a disproportionate number of staff who joined the service at a time of major changes in duty systems in the late 1970s.

8.39   There remains an important issue in respect of retention and promotion of those in minorities but it is not possible to measure the significance of this because of the shortcoming already identified in respect of the limited ability to monitor progress.

8.40   Promotion practices and procedures were frequently a concern throughout the workforce, with only a minority of officers being content with the arrangements in place. The inconsistency of approach and application, together with a lack of comprehensive coverage for all staff, led to a lack of confidence in the systems in place. A worrying number of staff, particularly those actively seeking promotion, referred to aspects of favouritism or the need to fit conventional models within the brigade. Strong personal support from individual senior members of staff was seen

as being vital to success, with great importance being placed on 'knowing the right people'. There was also mention of Masonic influences in more than one brigade. In one brigade, strong reservations were expressed by a number of individuals about serious failings in the people selected through the systems that are in place, to the extent that they saw those appointed as being incapable of meeting the needs of the job.

8.41   None of the brigades inspected had comprehensive appraisal and assessment procedures in place, although many had partial systems. It was unfortunate that in some cases this was because of Fire Brigades Union opposition, even though proposals to introduce arrangements did not include job evaluation or performance related pay. In the light of concerns within the workforce, this approach does not seem to be in anybody's interests. The lack of faith and confidence in promotion and appointment arrangements was frequently voiced as a reason for disbelief in a culture of equality and fairness and in some instances was undermining other well-intentioned initiatives. Similar misgivings existed in respect of the non-uniformed staff.

8.42   None of the brigades could provide detailed information on the retention of staff, or on progression during careers; nor was there any consistent information on reasons for leaving the service.

9 Training in Equality and Fairness

9.1   Training to improve understanding of rights and responsibilities and awareness was also given particular attention during the inspections. In view of other findings in this report it will not be surprising that the effectiveness of this, judged by the outcomes, was found to be wanting.

9.2   In some of the brigades this was despite a substantial long-term commitment in terms of both intent and resources. In others there had been attempts made but with no continuity of approach, and in one case no training had been carried out for more than six years. **The need for training, on the basis of what we found, extends to all involved; in leadership, management and in the workforce at large.**

Elected Members

9.3   The leadership starts with elected members of fire authorities, since despite obvious commitment in principle, the level of understanding of the full range of issues and some of their subtleties was clearly inadequate. There were however exceptions where experience and training elsewhere had clearly had a significant effect. One authority had provided training for all its members and those whom we met were quick to confirm that they had learned a great deal as a result, notwithstanding their previous belief that they were already well informed and experienced. In three cases the difficulties faced by combined fire authorities, in achieving an equitable and appropriate scheme of members' allowances, was given as the reason why this training had not been provided. This point was reinforced by replies to the questionnaire sent to the chairs of authorities.

Officers

9.4   The position was similar in the case of chief fire officers and members of their principal officer teams. Some were well informed, both individually and as teams. In some cases the knowledge and understanding was superficial and in other examples, ill-informed. There was no consistent pattern to the training. Some had been through their own brigade programmes, others had been involved in corporate training through their county councils and some had received external training through the Fire Service College or specialist providers.

9.5   Supervisory officer training was equally diverse with a wide variation in both the training provided for them and in the level of understanding they had gained from it. It was notable that the non-uniformed managers were generally more aware and more amenable to accepting the need to improve their knowledge and understanding.

Non-Uniformed Staff

9.6   There was a varied approach to the provision of training of these members of brigades. In some, the training for all staff was to the same standards and of the same priority. In others, non-uniformed members were not given training at all, or their training was given a low priority.

Staff on Fire Stations

9.7   Although the majority of fire station staff met by the team had been trained to varying degrees, the effect of this was generally limited to the achievement of compliance with orders or instructions. In the notable but rare exceptions where we encountered much more positive responses, it was clear that the training met its objective of achieving understanding and support to a much greater extent. In these cases it was obvious that the training had been 'owned' by the watch or station commander, whose overall credibility and specific commitment to equality and fairness had achieved recognition of the importance of the topic in those being trained.

Firefighter Development

9.8   In one brigade the whole emphasis of the training, and indeed the selection of recruits for that training, had been changed as part of a major review of organisational culture. Here the intention was to select recruits with a broader range of life skills and social awareness. They were then trained to a syllabus that reduces time spent on some of the elements found in conventional recruit training, to enable time to be devoted to encouraging understanding. This approach accepts and reflects the reality that the need is to provide inclusive development, over time, towards achievement of a level of overall competence.

9.9   It was acknowledged that the approach had led to the selection of individuals who could fit the real needs of today's firefighters, while bringing in a range of other skills and attributes to the service. This recognition existed among officers across the range of ranks and responsibilities. There were however concerns that it would be all too easy for the effects of this 'firefighter development programme' to be diluted unless similar requirements for the development of existing members of the service were to be put in place in support. National work and consultation to carry forward this concept is proceeding within the Implementation Working Group on Training Strategy which, like the Equal Opportunities Task Group, reports to the Strategic Committee on Personnel of the CFBAC.

Training Methods

9.10   The method of training delivery, as much as its content, seemed to be very significant. The majority of brigades depended on training potential trainers, such as watch commanders, then 'cascading' the training through that source. Although this approach can work well in some cases the variability in application of this method and the lack of quality control, raises doubts about its appropriateness. The ability of every potential trainer to be convincing, given the limitation in the breadth of knowledge of the non expert, or even lack of belief, or commitment, also needs to be carefully weighed.

9.11   The alternative approach where specialists are used to provide training, either in-house or through external providers, clearly is having a more positive effect. The consistency in achievement by this approach, of dependable levels of understanding and compliance, was found to be much greater. Such delivery methods are however much more resource hungry, requiring the availability of the trainers to match the training needs. They are also dependent on dovetailing those trainers with available time for those being trained; particularly those on operational shifts.

9.12   Two brigades had produced training packages using video presentations. These received mixed reviews, being found useful by some and condescending by others. They had been produced 'in house'. There is clearly a place for such packages if professionally produced, provided that they are well supported within an overall teaching and learning programme. Those described had been used in a variety of situations, ranging from stand-alone use on watch to incorporation into a two-day course. The supporting documentation was also very different in each application. The value gained therefore varied accordingly. One of the presentations was in use in a number of brigades.

9.13   Training methods also varied in respect of the length of training sessions and their frequency. Some courses were delivered away from the workplace, some on station as part of a programme, while some training depended on local initiative, utilising policy documents or training notes. Recording of the training provided was rare, as was monitoring of its effect. In one brigade individuals were assessed for their competency in equality and fairness. There was also a marked inconsistency in the periods allowed to elapse between the training provided to individuals in all but one brigade. This was mainly due to lack of follow up where training had been missed due to absences.

9.14   A particularly important aspect was the very negative reaction to the training provided in so many cases. Although there was a clear difference in the feelings of most of the younger staff, the majority of watch members saw the subject as irrelevant as well as unnecessary. In a few cases this clearly reflected an intolerant

view. Generally, however, there was considerable unease about the way equality and fairness training was delivered and what was seen as a heavy handed approach, which simply demanded compliance. It concentrated on the potential for disciplinary action, rather than to a process of improvement of understanding and personal development. This negative situation was clearly having a major impact on the whole topic.

9.15   It may be that the conventional approach to training in the fire service is appropriate for technical subjects or practical skills, but the difference in understanding achieved where a more involving style was used for this type of training, was notable. On the other hand, training that is inappropriate will create differences and indeed negativity.

Equality Training for Recruits

9.16   All recruit-training courses, used by the brigades inspected, included input on equality and fairness. Those who had recently returned from the course were aware of the purpose of the training, but none of them saw the sessions, of which only one exceeded two hours, as significant in the context of their overall training, nor did they feel it had changed their views. The exception was in the case of the brigade that had introduced the 'Firefighter Development Programme.'

Fire Service College

9.17   The Fire Service College has had a pivotal role in central training for the service and has also acted as a centre for the development and sharing of practices across a range of topics. We therefore asked the Commandant if we could examine the course content and teaching materials used in the provision of equality and fairness training.

9.18   The syllabus for each of the progressive training and advancement courses includes sessions dealing with equality, the duration of which varies from one session occupying 45 minutes on the crew command course, to four such periods on the junior officers advancement course. There are also periods of training allocated within both the divisional and the brigade command course. The context in which this training is provided is predicated on students having benefited from at least initial training before attendance on the respective courses. The teaching material and methods have been progressively updated to engage students in understanding and support for the underlying needs and benefits of advancing equality and fairness as well as improving their knowledge of legislative requirements. The updated teaching material was examined and within the constraints of the limited time allocated within each of the courses appears to be well produced and appropriate.

9.19   The command management teaching staff who deliver training were both knowledgeable and committed to advancing this subject. They believe that their input and the discussions that follow it, are well accepted and are achieving positive changes of attitude in many of the students who attend. It was not possible to assess this belief during the visit, but it seems credible in the light of the quality and commitment of the college staff. It is also consistent with our findings in brigades that younger staff, who are predominantly involved in these courses, are more positive in their approach.

9.20   The college does not currently provide any courses dedicated to equality, at any level.

9.21   We examined the particular issue of the facilities afforded to women students. In a practical sense, the student accommodation does not currently provide ideal facilities and the college's financial status over the last six years has made improvements difficult in view of constraints on building work and updating. Our concern, however, is in relation to the management of this acknowledged shortcoming.

9.22   There is no recognition among most male students that the college is no longer a solely male environment. The result of this was obvious to the women members of our team while they were using overnight accommodation. Nor has any clear position been reached in respect of the arrangements made for the accommodation requirements of women students, with ad-hoc decisions being made to meet the individual wishes of each student at the time. This approach, although well intentioned, exposes the woman to being made a special case at the outset of her attachment to the college. This choice may in any event result in a decision made in order to appear to 'fit in'. These arrangements will inevitably be inconsistent.

9.23   We do not believe that lack of ideal facilities should be allowed to justify failure to provide practical, dignified and appropriate arrangements. Similarly, aspects of personal behaviour which might be offensive to women in the overall environment of the college, need to be modified by well considered and consistent management. The women firefighters we spoke to during brigade inspections, mentioned their fear of having to 'run the gauntlet' of unwanted male attention throughout their time at the college.

10   Working Practices

10.1   The existing working practice within the emergency service culture is not one that makes it easy to provide for flexibility in every aspect of working conditions. The lack of flexibility encountered and in the consistency of approach are not however keeping pace with developments in society generally.

10.2   There are serious implications for advancing diversity, and for attracting people from a broader section of the community to join and continue within the service, while it appears to remain acceptable to manage the service on the basis of old –fashioned, inflexible working practices.

Facilities for Women

10.3   Obvious gender related issues, such as dealing with maternity leave, or facilitating child-care, are not well integrated into most of the brigades inspected. Their very mention was frequently taken as proof of the inability of those who might avail themselves of these reasonable expectations, to be part of the uniformed service.

10.4   Job sharing arrangements are seen almost in the same way, although some limited facilities were made available to some administrative staff and on a piecemeal basis to a few staff in control rooms. We did not encounter any clear schemes which individuals could enter, as a matter of course. Instead, individual cases were considered and then determined, often by officers at the highest levels. There were marked inconsistencies in the decisions taken and the actual facilities applied in each brigade and between brigades.

10.5   Inflexibility was also evident in dealing with simple matters. The issue of uniform appropriate to women was not actually being properly and reliably dealt with in any of the brigades, even though managers believed that arrangements were in place. In many cases, women firefighters had simply accepted whatever they were given in order to avoid confrontation. This is a sad reflection when it applies to working rig or undress uniform, as well as a worrying indicator of true commitment to the dignity at work for women in the fire service. **It is totally unacceptable when it applies to items of protective clothing, such as operational fire-fighting uniform.** Health and safety considerations at least ought to ensure properly fitting protective equipment. This problem extends to a philosophy that requires people in the service generally to fit the equipment rather than redesign the equipment to suit the people. Only one brigade of those inspected had started a positive campaign to address this.

10.6   Much easier issues, such as the provision of suitable locker, toilet and showering facilities for women, were given scant attention in almost every brigade, while protocols to manage these deficiencies in the short term were sadly lacking. Although it has to be recognised that finance for building improvements and provision of new facilities is scarce, the need for these is absolute, not an option, particularly in an environment where the intention is to advance equality of opportunity and dignity and fairness at work.

10.7   There is even difficulty and inconsistency in respect of arrangements for women in the dormitory accommodation used during night shifts. Some brigades have their own protocols for dealing with this issue, while in some cases the implications have not apparently been fully considered. This very uncertainty is unsatisfactory. Where due consideration results in a wish to provide separate accommodation, again, shortage of finance is being accepted as a reason why progress cannot be made. Invariably in these situations there are dormitories, locker rooms and shower facilities dedicated to officers in charge of watches and sometimes the other junior officers that could be put to this use without expense.

Facilities for People with Disabilities

10.8   Although according to our questionnaire some 42 brigades had instituted a programme to provide access and other facilities for people with disabilities, the remainder had not taken any action. This matter needs much greater attention now and will become increasingly more important, as the service's role in educating the public through community fire safety initiatives, increases. In addition it has been acknowledged in principle, that the exemption of the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act cannot be justified for the operational workforce, although no steps will be taken to remove the exemption until appropriate standards can be established. **It is surprising and a matter of great concern, that 27 brigades returned that they do not employ any people with disabilities in their non-uniformed sector, or, if they do, they are unaware of that fact.**

10.9   **Not all disabled people we spoke to were satisfied with the current arrangements in their brigades or with the consideration they were receiving. Some were quite angry about the lack of compassion shown and the neglect of their needs.**

Adversarial Relationships

10.10 Although the members of the team who served in the Inspectorate were accustomed to the regime, the extent to which confrontation flavoured the management/union interface surprised our advisers. It was difficult for them to understand why so many matters became a basis for conflict and why the style was

negotiation rather than co-operation. We therefore suggest that the overall intransigence of the Fire Brigades Union in conjunction with outdated, authoritative managerial style, are contributors to the present situation. This atmosphere was certainly seen as unhelpful to the development of modern and mutually supportive working practices.

11 Helping People

11.1 In addition to examining the working practices in respect of their contribution to equality and fairness, the team also examined the arrangements in place to help people within the fire service.

Policies on Harassment

11.2 In all the brigades inspected there were policies to provide support in the form of protection and compliance procedures, covering harassment in respect of race, sex and sexuality. Some were advertised by poster or circular; others were included in overall equality and fairness orders or other instructions. In most cases these procedures were specifically inclusive of all staff, not solely those in a minority. In most, but not all brigades, disability, age and religion were also included.

11.3 **It was clear however, that there are still serious difficulties being faced by a wide range of people within the service, not only by women or those from the black and ethnic minority communities. The causes were wide ranging. They come about as a result of individual relationships, the interaction between individuals and groups within their working environment, (such as a watch or department), and in some cases as a result of an overbearing managerial style, either as a result of the overall culture in the brigade or the inappropriate actions of particular officers.**

Discipline

11.4 The use of discipline, in the context of formal procedures under the Fire Services (Discipline) Regulations, was seen to be of little value by those we spoke to who had suffered harassment. The formality of the processes, the burden of proof and the extended appeals facilities were seen as weighted in the favour of those who abuse fairness rather than those who suffer from that abuse.

11.5 These difficulties were illustrated by a number of different examples, applicable to some extent in many of the brigades inspected. There were cases where fire authority members had reduced awards to those found guilty of offences under the regulations as a result of breaches of orders on equality and fairness. In one brigade we were told that the authority members had made it clear that they would never support a punishment of dismissal. In other brigades, those found guilty had been promoted shortly afterwards, or transferred to positions where those who had complained against them, or others who might be vulnerable, were under their command, or subject to their influence.

Support systems

11.6   The systems to provide people with support, and the responsibility for them, was different in each brigade, varying from the provision of specialist members of staff employed solely for that purpose, through to multi-purpose staff for whom this work was an added responsibility. In some brigades volunteer counsellors were established and given training for this role. In others it was part of the responsibility of occupational health advisers. In one of the brigades, it was provided by external consultants.

11.7   The credibility of these systems varied; from those in which all staff are confident, to those where the abilities of those involved or the effectiveness of the systems are seriously doubted. There were general concerns about confidentiality, with many staff indicating that they would be more confident in following union procedures for that reason. Some brigades received confidential workload reports to assist with monitoring, while in others there was no connection whatsoever. Although most staff are clearly aware of the arrangements in their brigade, there was an instinctive wish to pursue difficulties through people they knew rather than by means of remote arrangements. There were also significant numbers of individuals who made it clear that they would have no confidence in the support of the chain of command. Where equality and fairness advisors were in place they were often involved in supporting and counselling staff, and had a substantial workload in some brigades.

11.8   Although there was some satisfaction with the advice and support provided by some of these arrangements, the effectiveness of using them, in cases where there are serious difficulties, was not seen to be great as judged by staff on the basis of the outcomes. In these circumstances the general view was that brigade managers at all levels did not wish to be faced with such difficulties. It appeared that they preferred that they be contained rather than grasped openly as opportunities to make a clear statement about their commitment and the acceptability, or otherwise, of behaviour.

Mentoring

11.9   We did not encounter any form of mentoring and developmental support for those from minorities who were in the service, although in one case a chief fire officer reported that he personally interviewed all women entrants to offer his personal support in dealing with any difficulty they might encounter. A number of senior and principal officers are however involved in mentoring work outside the service.

12 Service Delivery

12.1   In accordance with our terms of reference, we sought to ascertain whether there was any difference in the levels of service delivery provided to different communities within each brigade area. This was difficult to analyse objectively due to the absence of any comprehensive form of monitoring in any of the brigades inspected.

12.2   Some provided excellent 'after the fire' literature, including versions produced in a range of languages. Leaflets to make comment or complaint about services received were also in common use, although the format of these did not enable any monitoring of the comparison of service provided to different communities, or individuals. Some brigades supplemented this approach by arranging sampling of the experiences of 'customers' in the form of visits from supervisory officers, but it did not appear that either form of follow-up had any focus on differences of service resulting from either race or socio-economic groupings. Similarly, few brigades published information on the level of service, attention or consideration, that members of the public should expect to receive as a right when they needed a fire service response or fire safety services. In response to the questionnaire, 18 brigades acknowledged that they did not have arrangements in place to monitor service delivery to ethnic minority communities.

12.3   **At a subjective level, all staff involved in service delivery who were questioned about this important area, were adamant that there was no difference at all in the response to emergencies, whatever their location might be and irrespective of the race or status of those needing help. This aspect was seen as an 'act of faith' and any suggestion that this level of equality might be questioned was seen as objectionable by everyone who we interviewed or who took part in our discussions. The strength of feeling and commitment to the service delivery ethic that we encountered throughout our visits, convinced us that there should be no doubt about the intention to provide a fair equitable, high quality service to the whole community.**

12.4   This applies not only to the provision of front line, emergency based services, but also to fire safety enforcement and advice, as well as to training and education services. This was confirmed by the responses we received from Racial Equality Councils, both in response to our national questionnaire, and in the discussions with these councils in the brigades we visited.

12.5   **Although extended questioning of staff within the service revealed some concerns about the potential for some subconscious differences in approach in a non-emergency context, which certainly need to be improved**

upon, we were satisfied that the 'act of faith' has some real substance. This we thought, was a very positive and reassuring outcome, and one that could certainly provide an excellent foundation of hope for an improvement in other areas of equality and fairness in the future.

13 The Questionnaire to Chief Fire Officers

13.1 As has already been mentioned, a summary of the responses to the full questionnaire sent to chief fire officers is included as appendix A in the annex to this report. The questions and groupings of replies are set out and are of particular interest, not least because those who returned them were aware of their intended use, which is to support our inspection findings. It was clear that not all brigades found it easy to reply to this questionnaire, although by contrast, others did so quickly and effectively. Some had clearly not previously contemplated or collated information on the matters into which it was enquiring. On a more **positive front, some brigades have already used this questionnaire as a prompt towards issues that they should review and have undertaken work, thus reacting positively to the lead it could give.**

14   Introduction

14.1   **The team had greatest difficulty in coming to terms with the full range of the experiences we shared, because of the contradictions and inconsistencies we encountered. On one hand, we could only be impressed by the overall dedication of the workforce, of all ranks, and grades, and functions, towards supporting the service and providing for the needs of the public in any emergency, or other service delivery circumstance. This was seen to be irrespective of the class, race, sex or creed of those who depended upon them. The sense of belonging and pride in that and in the commitment to providing service was evident in almost every person we encountered.**

14.2   By contrast, the objective of many of the workforce we met seemed to be the continuation of the status quo. Avoidance of uncertainty and denial of any challenge seemed to be the objective of many of the workforce that we met. We stress that this negative view is not a reflection of all the staff we met, or indeed of all in the service. The strength of the views with which we were faced with and their consistency was such that we are however sure that it constitutes a significant block on change.   **As a consequence, we are strongly of the opinion that substantial change is necessary in the management and culture of the service to achieve an environment where equality and fairness can be integrated into its whole operation and organisation.**

14.3   **The conclusions that follow set out the areas in which we consider changes are necessary.**

15 Leadership

15.1 The most important change required is in respect of leadership.

15.2 In our findings we refer to the lack of leadership in taking equality and fairness forward. In these conclusions we would however point to encouraging signs on two levels. The first is that the inherent nature of members of the service is to be helpful, supportive and 'fair', according at least to their current understanding of the word. The second is the strong ethos of 'compliance', and there is clear evidence that in those areas of service activity where leadership is provided, it is willingly, even enthusiastically, followed. We have no doubt that the leadership of the service will, as a result of this report give priority to addressing these issues positively. The weaknesses we identify have been principally brought about by 'omission' rather than 'commission'. However the Bucke Report of 1994 identified many of the issues highlighted in these conclusions. An opportunity was missed then. This must not be allowed to happen again.

15.3 This will place demands on the Home Office, including the Fire Service Inspectorate, on members of fire authorities and on their chief fire officers. It will also require the acceptance, co-operation and support of the workforce and all the associations and unions that represent them.

15.4 The principal need, given the wealth of good intention we encountered from most leaders during our inspections, is to take steps to change this intention into positive, committed activity, indeed to **'walk the talk'**. In view of findings across all topics, it is clear that this must involve a fundamental reappraisal of the way that the service is led, both constitutionally and through its managerial and command processes. **We recommend that the entire leadership of the fire service takes positive steps to display commitment to equality and fairness.**

The Home Office

15.5 The Home Office is the government department responsible for the fire service in England and Wales. But it is the local authorities, having the role of 'fire authorities' under the Fire Services Acts of 1947 and 1959 which are responsible for the provision of the service. The Home Secretary has no power to direct either the fire authority or their chief officers, other than in a number of specific duties under the Acts and supporting regulations. He has no direct power of sanction.

15.6 The Fire and Emergency Planning Directorate has a key role in supporting one of the Home Office's seven published principal aims. That aim is to reduce the incidence of fire and related death, injury and damage. A fire service with the right

policy framework, structures, powers, training and resources is an underpinning objective to achieve the aim. The directorate formulates guidance through the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC) and its committees on the full range of fire service activity and the Inspectorate reports to the Home Secretary on the manner in which the fire authorities discharge their responsibilities.

15.7   In 1991 the CFBAC established an Equal Opportunities Joint Committee (EOJC) chaired by the Home Office to provide a service wide focus on the issues and advise the Home Secretary on fire service equal opportunities matters. The EOJC published annual reports summarising the data collected by the Home Office, reporting on activities and steps taken to encourage initiatives within the service to further equality and fairness.

15.8   As a result of changes to the structure and working practice within the CFBAC in 1998, the committee was wound up and the Joint Strategic Committee on Personnel formed the Equal Opportunities Task Group with an agreed programme of work.

15.9   As has already been set out in this report, some of these arrangements have had some effect, but they have certainly not driven the changes which, we believe, all involved in the leadership of the service, would wish to see. **The Home Office has a key role in promoting best practice in the encouragement of diversity and in ensuring equality and fairness is embedded within the service and needs to exercise it.**

15.10 We do not feel that our terms of reference, or competence, enable us to make recommendations in respect of any of these structural and constitutional arrangements. We do, however, conclude that unless these can prove capable of giving a new and dynamic impetus to overcome the many identified shortcomings, the Home Secretary might wish to give them serious consideration.

HM Fire Service Inspectorate

15.11 It has already been determined, within the Inspectorate's business plan, that the Inspectorate should be more actively involved in equality and fairness. We conclude that the broader benefits, both for society and the service are such that this work must be afforded a very high priority in inspection programmes, as an over-arching indicator of the brigades' managerial and command effectiveness. This role will be extended to managing and validating the equality statistics which are collected annually and in checking performance and progress of brigades in advancing policies, enacting procedures, providing effective training and monitoring their achievement throughout. **We recommend that the findings within this**

report should be used to support the application of HM Inspectorate's published 'Expectations' during brigade inspections of all kinds.

15.12 We conclude that it will be necessary to provide a further national impetus to this work to enable the improvements we confidently expect to be reported upon. This report will therefore be kept under continuous review within the work of the Inspectorate. **We also recommend that a further full thematic review should be planned, to report during the fourth year (2003), following publication of this report.**

Members of Fire Authorities and the Local Government Association

15.13 In consideration of the role of members of fire authorities in respect of equality and fairness, it is necessary to point out that there are perceived to be differences in the position and standing of members of the three different types of authority. These are the metropolitan fire and civil defence authorities; county councils and combined fire authorities in England and in Wales. These differences are perceived as significant in that the members of combined fire authorities, although they have the same responsibilities as those in metropolitan and county fire authorities, have experienced different relationships with their own primary authorities. These have manifested themselves in the requirement to obtain authority from the primary (Welsh district, English county or unitary borough) authority for activities committing the fire authority to expenditure.

15.14 Some of the members we spoke to drew attention to what they saw as a potential conflict of interest. They saw themselves, in effect, mandated or pre-directed on decisions. They indicated that this led to difficulty in raising or dealing with issues which were not at that time the priorities of their own councils. They were unable to attract allowances for duties beyond the minimum requirement of attendance at scheduled meetings. This resulted in an inability to commit member time to training on equality and fairness, and a discouragement to taking up leadership positions with the authority, or in undertaking additional duties. The inability to drive any issue having potential resource implications through these constraints, was frequently given as a reason why members had not been able to satisfy their wishes to advance equality and fairness.

15.15 A number of members also spoke of their reluctance to be the determinants of Disciplinary Appeals where dismissal was involved. There was an obvious uneasiness about the role of members in such matters, who spoke of the realism of local political imperatives.

15.16 Our conclusion is that fire authorities need support in dealing with these issues. As a general rule a local authority is permitted to co-opt individuals who are

not members of the authority onto its committees and sub committees (Section 102 (3) of the Local Government Act 1972). Consideration should be given as to how far these provisions apply to the different categories of fire authority and whether there is scope for using them more effectively in the context of equality and fairness.

We recommend that the benefit of providing an external point of reference to fire authorities through the appointment of individuals to them who are not members of the elected constituent authorities be actively pursued through the CFBAC.

15.17 We also conclude that to address the current disparate arrangements for training of members, in view of their special role in driving equality and fairness forward, a new impetus is required.

We recommend that the Home Office, and the Local Government Association should consider a regional programme of initial seminars to launch this, with a schedule of further events to continue this commitment. Sharing this experience, and the commitment it entails from all the leadership of the service, would also be of great assistance to chief fire officers and their principal officers.

The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council.

15.18 We conclude that the Equal Opportunities Task Group of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council needs to be strengthened. This should include both the strength of managerial representation committed to it by the Home Office, and broadening representation to enable the minority groups within the service to have direct access to it. Our rationale is that those who experience and suffer from discrimination are those best equipped to inform the work of the task group.

We recommend that the Equal Opportunities Task Group be strengthened. We also recommend that membership of, or direct access to, the Task Group be granted to:

- ➲ **The Black and Ethnic Minority Members of the Fire Brigades Union**
- ➲ **The National Women's Advisory Council of the Fire Brigades Union**
- ➲ **Networking Women in the Fire Service**
- ➲ **The Gay and Lesbian Support Group of the Fire Brigades Union**

Unions

15.19 We conclude that the unions are already making a strong leadership contribution, but more could be done, by all of them working together. The strength of the Fire Brigades Union, when compared with the membership from other national unions, is such that it could usefully lead this initiative, perhaps in this special case, extending co-operation to representative bodies other than those which are affiliated to the Trades Union Congress. **The objective would be to maximise the input and influence of all staff in the service.**

The Fire Service approach to Leadership

15.20 All of the findings of the thematic review have emphasised a very real need for a change in the style of leadership and the processes of management within the fire service. **We conclude that other activities in support of achieving an inherently fair, equality based service will founder unless this essential change is recognised as a prerequisite.**

15.21 The contributing elements to this style involve history, the selection and promotion procedures in place, pressure of work and agendas for change, perceived shortage of resources and a less than co-operative management and union interface**. While the service continues to win public support for its external activity, its internal capacity to deal with change, modernise and adapt to a different role, as evidenced by all that we have seen must be a matter of concern.** On the basis of our terms of reference it is not for us, in reporting on this thematic review inspection, to determine what sort of a comprehensive programme of change is necessary to address all these issues. The extent of our concern in more than one brigade was such that we conclude that broader, more far reaching enquiry and review processes should be applied to the fire service. **We therefore recommend that a thematic review enquire into the leadership of the fire service and other issues identified in this chapter.**

The Interface between the Public and the Service

15.22 The broader requirement of the service to consult and inform the public needs to be addressed. Within this review, it became clear that the connection between individual brigades and the black and ethnic minority communities they serve was at best patchy. Our responses from the Racial Equality Councils indicated that in many cases there was no contact and in others, it only occurred inconsistently, for example during isolated initiatives. Equally the Racial Equality Councils had not seen a particular need, in view of other priorities, to concentrate their own attentions on the service.

16   Policy and Procedures

16.1   We conclude that there is a need for brigades to review all their equality and fairness policies and the procedures and processes that support them. The need is to provide clear, accessible documentation that sets out to encourage, rather than coerce, but which makes clear the rights and responsibilities of individuals as well as the organisation. The policies need to be inclusive of the rights of all staff, not solely those currently seen in the minority.   Effective systems should be in place to provide for monitoring of effectiveness, review and updating in response to that monitoring.

16.2   While there is a benefit in each brigade creating documentation of its own to ensure ownership, we encountered examples of this process and the extended consultation that has to accompany it. We concluded that this extent of commitment is a waste of scarce resources at this stage. The documentation provided by the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority is currently judged overall to be the best available, thus providing a ready basis for adoption for other brigades, with the opportunity to avoid initial duplication of effort. Only minor adaptation should be necessary to suit local circumstances. The support and understanding of the unions in the fire service in encouraging acceptance of a common procedure, that could be arrived at through the Equal Opportunities Task Group of the CFBAC, would greatly assist progress in this area. Additionally, should that approach not be supported, both the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality provide excellent check lists against which to compare policy documentation. We conclude that it is necessary to ensure that these procedures include full and proper detail in order to assure the rights of those suffering either discrimination or harassment. It is also important that the format is attractive and uncomplicated so as to make it accessible and welcome throughout the workforce of the whole brigade.

We therefore recommend that the Equal Opportunities Task Group produce a note for guidance, based on existing best practice, to include model equality and fairness policies and procedures which brigades would be encouraged to adopt.

16.3   **The establishment of policies, however, is only a start. It is the effect given to them and the commitment to the objectives they seek to achieve, which will result in improvements.**

16.4   We believe that it is essential for the whole command and management of the service at all levels, to be integrated into the process of ensuring a culture based upon equality and fairness. We are reminded of the progression of the attention to

management applied to the health and safety activity of the service over recent years. We are encouraged that this topic previously seen as a specialism, has activated a change in approach. This has been done by integrating that important function, involving all staff in the service, to the extent that, in the best brigades, health and safety is now embedded in all activities, with continued attention to this being driven by the workforce and management together. This approach is now required in respect of equality and fairness.

We recommend that brigades set up arrangements to monitor the implementation of these policies.

As a contribution to this we have appended as appendix E in the annex booklet, a check-list for fire brigades which may assist in the process of review.

Funding

16.5   It is worrying that about 60% of chief fire officers stated that lack of funding was an issue holding back equality. Whilst it is true to say that some initiatives require new commitment and that some will require funding, it is also true that much can be achieved within existing resources, or at little cost to a brigade. Effective management and leadership by officers, an acceptance of managerial responsibility, and leading by example, will all achieve considerable improvements within the service.

16.6   No consensus of view emerged on how best to apply additional resources for this activity. Some of the suggestions made appear unlikely to achieve improvements unless they are linked to definite aims, and action plans. The carrying out of a customer survey, for example, is unlikely in itself to achieve improvements. Similarly, the employment of a fairness and equality officer is not an improvement, unless that officer is effectively used. Some brigades do not have any specific funding in support of equality and fairness initiatives. In some cases however this is clearly not preventing progress. In others, current funding priorities may be a restriction. **We therefore recommend that each fire authority ensures appropriate resources are deployed to match their expectations in respect of equality and fairness.**

Equality and Fairness Action or Focus Groups

16.7   The proper use of equality and fairness action or focus groups could be of great benefit to brigades, not only in establishing policies but also in keeping them under review. We conclude that such groups must have direct access to the brigade managerial team and be fully supported and empowered from that level. It is also important to ensure that the groups include proper representation, not only to

involve the full range of staff within the brigade but also to provide for membership from the minority groups themselves. Our discussions with each of the national networks and support groups convinced us that their officers and members could also make an invaluable contribution at local level.

We encourage all brigades to establish and empower task groups to drive forward equality and fairness, with representation from minorities in the workplace being encouraged.

The Role of Specialist Advisors

16.8   In our findings we drew attention to the danger of over-dependence on specialist advisors within the management of equality and fairness. It is however important to emphasise that we conclude that these specialists have a vital role in advising management and the workforce at large on equality and fairness issues. They should be extensively involved in policy and procedure development, as well as review.

We recommend that in all brigades there should be such a post (or posts in larger brigades). In the smaller brigades, this role might form part of the duties of the appointee, rather than a full time commitment.

16.9   The even greater need in this respect, however, is to transfer proper responsibility for, and real ownership of, equality and fairness to those who have supervisory responsibilities at all levels within the service. We conclude, however, that there is a considerable need to provide proper training for <u>all</u> these supervisors and to provide essential support, through advisors and properly trained principal managers, to underwrite this change. We found this need in every brigade visited and we can only conclude that this will be a major national requirement. This has substantial implications, both in terms of affording major priority to this need, and in providing resources to support the activities essential to achieving success, in the shortest practicable time. Some of these needs are mentioned in the discussion that follows in respect of training.

17 Culture

17.1 In view of our findings in respect of culture, we have concluded that of all the areas that need attention, it is by changing the culture that the most significant improvements will be gained.

17.2 Quite simply the service needs to be modernised throughout its thinking and in its actions, to reflect more closely the culture within society at large. While we envisage that this sort of change will be grasped as an opportunity by many members of the service, we recognise that there may be a much larger number who would be resistant, even to the suggestion of any change. We have set out in our findings the many manifestations that we identify as contributing to the unacceptable current culture and propose a number of independent improvements which change will assist. We do not however believe that, helpful though these changes will be, they go far enough in revising and in revitalising the service for the beginning of the new millennium. In our conclusions on fire service leadership style, we recommended that a thematic review should be urgently established to look into the leadership of the service. **The terms of reference of the thematic review should include examination of the overall culture of the service in order that a comprehensive assessment of the full need for improvement and the means by which it might be achieved is obtained.**

Immediate Issues

17.3 We conclude that the 'closed' watch work regime is the prime contributor to the need to 'fit in' to the 'family' culture. Its effect on the single tier entry officers it breeds, is to ensure continued acceptance of its characteristics and its implications without question. There is a need to break down this exclusive culture and to replace it with a team approach.

17.4 The roots of the watch work regime are of course in the need to provide 24-hour availability and, at the time of introduction, to condition the workforce to a longer working week than most other occupations. Because of the large number of hours then worked, a considerable proportion of the shift pattern was spent on 'stand-down'. This meant, once essential duty had been completed, that the watch would remain available for emergency call out, but would stand-down from other work. This time was used for collective social or sporting activities. This has resulted in 'living together' being as important as working together.

17.5 The principal contributor to this now traditional practice, is the long night shift of 15 hours. This requires rest and stand-down time of at least nine hours, in each night shift, since only limited productive work can realistically be achieved over

night and the extreme length of shift and potential operational demands require the ability to rest.

17.6   Today, there is an opportunity to roster staff to duty requirements rather than to a simplistic recurring rota pattern. This would have the added benefit of utilising available time to the maximum benefit, both to enhance actual service delivery and enable training, avoiding a rigid rota system, based on such long continuous periods of duty. The long hours may disadvantage women or men with child or family care responsibilities. This may produce unjustifiable indirect discrimination against women and staff who wish to vary their shift patterns, changes in working hours and practice. This is supported by the Working Hours Directive and health and safety considerations, which provide the opportunity to devise work practice to avoid the need for such long night shifts. Such arrangements could reduce the necessity for stand-down time <u>and</u> enable a break in the long-standing 'family' tradition of watches. It would also offer the potential for more flexible working.

17.7   We are aware that the national employers are anxious to increase the effectiveness of utilisation, to ensure best value from fire service staffing. We envisage that a move to **a non-watch orientated work practice could be the basis of a change in the existing culture of the service, thus contributing to an environment where equality and fairness can flourish.**

17.8   Immediately, we recommend that brigades should take steps to encourage an open, inclusive team culture at all levels.

Uniform

17.9   There is clearly a need for members of the fire service to be easily recognisable, and this is currently achieved at a national level by the provision of 'firefighting' uniform and protective clothing, (although recent developments involving changing the colour of fire tunics are beginning to vary even that.) This identity is important for recognition in emergency situations, but also is helpful and reassuring to the community.

17.10 We also conclude that the current inconsistency in types of uniform other than that classified as operational, is unacceptable. This is particularly so in respect of the identification of the members of the service involved in work within the community, particularly community fire safety. We saw many examples or varieties of local work-wear, all of which had sought to address practical considerations of suitability for the job and to achieve a less formal style.   Unfortunately the extent of variation between brigades and the different conventions for when and how to wear the uniform undermined these good intentions. **We would like to see the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council consider again whether a practical form of corporate wear might be adopted nationally.**

17.11 Our concerns about the uniform culture go much deeper. We can only conclude that the variety of uniform used is inclined to create division and status awareness rather than appropriate identity. It also produces and confirms unnecessary 'differences' between people who need to work together. The image of senior officers wearing formal militaristic style uniform, while the front line workforce wears boiler suits and teeshirts is not an attractive one, especially when reinforced by a situation in which junior headquarters staff are afforded officer uniform status. Connected to uniform are the formalities which attach to it, such as 'squad drill', saluting and similar activities which have no real place in a civilian emergency service. The need to respond to instruction and react in emergency situations requires a thinking approach and self-discipline appropriate to the responsibilities of the individuals. The team members from outside the service also found the use of such generally accepted fire service terms as 'Commandant', outdated and militaristic. These are issues which will no doubt be considered by the thematic review we have proposed on leadership; but we anticipate that brigades will need to consider them immediately in moving to the inclusive team approach we have recommended at paragraph 17.8 above.

Women Firefighters

17.12 We have to conclude that there is a need for major change in the culture of a service that is so strongly opposed to women being able to join the uniformed section and perform operational duties. Even if the service were to become very much more welcoming to women, it is unlikely that very large numbers would wish to join in the foreseeable future, or that substantial numbers would be able to meet the physical requirements of the legitimate, and essential job related testing. We are certain, however, that there are significant numbers of women who might wish to join. The limiting factor simply is the lack of willingness of male dominated 'macho' culture to accept this self-evident fact.

17.13 In our findings, we have touched upon the range of myths and anecdotes which continue to reinforce these stereotypical 'reasons' for those women who wish to join failing to meet requirements of the job. This, together with the manner in which the service has dealt with the issue of gender over the past twenty years, needs to be accepted as a phase. There must now be no doubt that all people successfully recruited to the service have met the legitimate nationally prescribed standards. All must be welcomed for the individual contributions they bring to the service, irrespective of their sex, or indeed race. It follows that the need to change attitudes is a pre-requisite, in order to provide a welcoming culture and then establish a proper basis of 'suitability' for recruitment, subsequent training and job performance that will remove any of the doubts or concerns that have existed in the past.

17.14 We are aware of the substantial work which has been developing over five years, with the objective of providing a definitive role map for the job of firefighter. This has just been published. This, together with a regime of competency based training intended to enable proper standards of performance to be achieved, assessed and verified, again to properly authenticated standards, will be of great importance. We are encouraged that in this work at least the emphasis on physical standards is limited. All that is needed now is to ascribe appropriate standards for these physical aspects to meet the needs of the job, without discrimination. The outcome of this work is a high priority and is dependent on the co-operation and commitment of all members of the CFBAC to bring about a successful conclusion. We hope that this will have be achieved at the earliest possible date.

17.15 We are also anxious, on the basis of what we have found, that the culture should change to allow women to be valued for the contribution they can make to the job as well as maintaining that they can, and should be different, as women. This requires affording them facilities that recognise and enable differences to be dealt with, with dignity, as a right and not a privilege. These facilities can be as simple as providing uniform items suitable for the shape or size of women or require building works or re-allocation of existing facilities, to provide toilet, shower or locker rooms.

17.16 We have concluded that in the main, only lip service has been given to these needs and that a real and determined commitment is now necessary by all brigades to ensure that proper arrangements are in place both for women in the service, and those who visit its premises.

We recommend that each brigade should take positive steps to introduce a culture that values the contribution that can be made to it by women, that facilities required by women firefighters are introduced as a matter of the highest priority and that these aspects are monitored and reported upon by HM Inspectors.

17.17 It is also necessary to evolve consistent and credible protocols to clarify working practice. We found that inconsistency between brigades and between stations in a range of matters is causing confusion and difficulty as well as disadvantaging and exposing women at work. Simple examples, such as the arrangements for determining how dormitories, locker rooms, shower facilities or toilets should be used, can all be overcome by agreed and recognised protocols. **We therefore recommend that the Equal Opportunities Task Group consider a common protocol for working practices and facilities for women and that this is made available to the service.**

17.18 The support of women members who wish to contribute to or benefit from the national women's groups or network, was also a matter of difficulty in some brigades. Improved understanding of the role of these groups is required. The current situation where many women firefighters avoid membership is an unfortunate manifestation of the culture that is resisting diversity. It is also of concern that there is a lack of recognition of the fact that it is not only women in uniform that need this support. We conclude that strengthening of the arrangements for women's networks should be enthusiastically supported, not only by every brigade management, but also by women in the service. In addition to providing support, this improvement would be of great assistance in furthering the identification of issues so they can be dealt with productively. Our overall conclusion in respect of the experiences of women is that the service is **'institutionally sexist'** and it needs to make rapid and fundamental changes in this respect.

Black and Ethnic Minority Firefighters

17.19 Our most significant conclusion is that there is a surprising and worrying ignorance of matters relating to race and culture. During our inspections the issue of 'institutionalised racism' was raised by many staff, seeking our views as a result of what we had experienced. We now have to conclude that, on the basis of the interpretation provided in the Report of the Judicial Enquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence, that the fire service, as represented by the brigades we inspected, **might be held to be 'institutionally racist'.** This conclusion is reached as a result of the extent of unwitting or ignorance-based failings that we witnessed within the service**. This will have to change.**

17.20 The Home Secretary has now published targets for recruitment, retention and career progression for members of the black and ethnic minority communities within the Home Office and all its sponsored services. These can only be met if the service at large connects with these communities, not only at the time of recruitment but convincingly, consistently and persistently. Most importantly it will require existing and future members of the service from the black and ethnic minority communities to feel able to recommend a career in the service to members of their communities. **Their message to us was that they could not do so at present. We recommend that steps are taken to rectify this situation.**

17.21 **We mentioned concern within the service in respect of targeting. The extent of this misunderstanding, together with that resulting from issues around any form of positive action, is such that we conclude that the service will need to take steps to ensure that the difference between targets and 'quotas' are understood. It also needs to clarify the reasons for, and limitations of, positive action.**

Sexuality

17.22 We have concluded that the service is not currently capable of dealing positively with sexuality. This is, not least, because it does not recognise this as a real life matter that applies to the service. It is essential that the reality - that is that the fire service will not be greatly different from society in general in this respect - is recognised and responded to in a positive manner. This again is a matter that needs to be grasped by the most senior management of the service. **We recommend that brigades take steps to review and strengthen the protection of members of the service who come from the gay and lesbian community, through the inclusion of sexuality within equality and fairness policies.** Without this reassurance, these people are without protection from discrimination and harassment in the workplace.

17.23 We can only conclude, on the basis of all we encountered, that the most difficult of all the tasks faced by the service in advancing equality and fairness, will be moving opinion and understanding on the issue of sexuality.

18 Recruitment

18.1   In the light of all our findings it is clear that the arrangements for recruitment of uniformed staff, both in terms of principles and practice need to be reviewed and modified to provide the underpinning basis for all personnel practice in the future. In view of the need for brigades to seek to increase the numbers in the service who come from groups that are currently under-represented, and to respond to targeting initiatives, this should be done urgently.

18.2   Each of the elements set out in our findings need to be addressed and we can only conclude that these issues must be dealt with collectively through the national machinery of the CFBAC. We emphasise this point since the achievement of consistency in all matters connected with recruitment is essential. Even then we are concerned that the large number of recruitment issues dispersed throughout brigades, many of which are operated infrequently dealing with very small numbers of appointments, will have great difficulty in providing the essential consistency. It has also been made clear that the resources currently required by brigades to operate recruitment procedures are excessive. **We believe that common system by means of which brigades can work together on recruitment, perhaps at regional level, should be put in place. We recommend that the extent to which such common recruitment systems can be developed should be examined through the CFBAC.** The concerns about 'serial applicants' would also be addressed by these means.

18.3   The standards used for assessing applicants, which again need to be applied consistently, require particular consideration. We have mentioned emerging work on role mapping which will allow a national job description and enable a person specification to be published. **In its work on recruitment systems, we would encourage the CFBAC to consult relevant outside organisations such as the Commission for Racial Equality and the Equal Opportunities Commission.**

18.4   Assessment of applicants against these criteria will require the development of professionally assessed and validated ability range tests unless recognition of individual national educational qualifications prove appropriate to some of these criteria. As has been emphasised within our findings, the establishment of appropriate national medical and physical standards, with testing procedures to allow them to be applied to prospective candidates, and making them explicit will require special attention. Given the previous history of the evolution of existing standards **we would encourage the CFBAC to invite views of what medical and physical standards should be taken as the minimum requirements.** In coming to this conclusion we have been encouraged by the considerable advances made by the British army through such an approach.

Single Tier Entry

18.5   Although this is an issue which has broader implications, we are concerned that existing single tier entry systems may be contributing to the lack of consistency in the criteria applied to the assessment of applicants. If the base for recruitment of a 'firefighter' is to be set solely on objective criteria targeted on the needs of that role, it appears essential that some other process is put in place to allow potential for advancement to be identified whilst in service, to provide for the supervisory and specialist needs. Single tier entry has undoubtedly been reinforced in the past by the judgement of interviewers that some candidates have potential to meet these needs. This random approach will not be acceptable or appropriate in a single-role based recruitment process. As was identified by the CFBAC's Training Strategy Group Report, published in 1994, it follows that a formal, nationally recognised, progressive assessment procedure, linked to appropriate training, will be essential if a single tier entry system is to continue.

18.6   Single tier entry can restrict the access of some potential applicants to jobs for which they may be ideally suited. It can also maintain and encourage the existing culture and conventions in an organisation, which in the light of the implications for equality and fairness may not be in the best interests of the public or the fire service. While there may be substantial reasons for the maintenance of a direct link with front line service delivery for all who join, the breadth of the actual role in today's service and the need for a wider range of base skills will increasingly question that convention as an absolute requirement. **These are matters which will fall to the thematic review on leadership if they are not previously dealt with by the CFBAC group responsible for implementing the Training Strategy Group's report.**

Retained Recruitment

18.7   Although the requirements of recruiting to the retained service are constrained by considerations of location and availability, there remains a need to ensure that appointments are made which take full account of equality and fairness. Traditional approaches based on word of mouth and local knowledge alone will not meet this expectation. Under these circumstances it is obvious that due attention must be paid to the creation of a more welcoming environment, supported by proper management, training and facilities. Brigade level management of procedures and campaigns needs to be applied. The provision of full information packs to enquirers and free access to application forms and advice must be assured, as well as the ability to monitor properly enquiries and applications. Although some of the retained officers were clearly more than capable of managing local recruitment fairly, **we recommend that centrally supported and managed retained recruitment procedures be put in place in all brigades.** This will remove any

chance of locally applied discrimination, and provide a proper base for the monitoring of outcomes. In addition to advancing equality and fairness, it appeared that improvements to all these matters would also contribute to increasing the numbers of applications for the retained service, particularly from women.

18.8   We conclude that since the detailed requirements for appointment to the wholetime and retained service are significantly different, procedures which afford priority to serving retained personnel as applicants to the wholetime service, cannot be justified. **We recommend that those brigades that have arrangements which advantage members of the retained service when applying to join as wholetime members withdraw them.**

Targets for recruitment of under represented people.

18.9   In view of the widespread lack of understanding of the purpose of recruitment and the justification for targets, it is essential that all staff are informed and encouraged to support this initiative which would be seriously affected by lack of proper appreciation throughout the brigade.

18.10   There are many anecdotal reasons advanced for the apparent lack of interest in applying to join the service, shown by members from the black and ethnic minority community. We are aware that the Home Office has commissioned research into this. The results will be crucial in advancing recruitment activities.

18.11   It is already clear that considerable efforts are being made by many brigades to embrace the achievement of the targets. It appears that this commendable commitment on a brigade by brigade basis may duplicate effort in terms of developing campaigns, initiatives or engaging consultants to assist in this. **We therefore recommend that the Equal Opportunities Task Group review the initiatives to achieve targets conducted by various brigades and circulate guidance to brigades.**

Monitoring

18.12   In view of our findings on the lack of reliable data to allow monitoring across the service, it is now essential that brigades are encouraged to ensure that robust arrangements are in place. As a pre-requisite the national expectation in this respect needs to be clarified and definitive guidelines established as quickly as possible. We suggest that through inspections carried out by HM Fire Service Inspectorate the Equal Opportunities Task Group should be informed of the extent to which brigades can meet these guidelines. Attention to monitoring will be particularly important in the context of the achievement of targets, to provide

reliable data on actual performance, to inform the extent of success or otherwise, and to identify the reasons for the outcomes.

Discipline

18.13 Our findings set out substantial reservations about the effectiveness of the Fire Services Discipline Regulations in dealing with contraventions against equality and fairness policies or instructions and we mention some examples. **We are not competent to pass judgement on any of these outcomes. We must however conclude that the reservations, expressed by so many people in respect of the effectiveness and the relevance of these regulations within a civilian service, suggest that this application of disciplinary arrangements which is different from those used elsewhere in local government should be questioned. We therefore recommend that the Home Office, in consultation with the appropriate parties, give serious consideration to advising the Home Secretary on the validity of these regulations.**

19   Training in Equality and Fairness

19.1   The overall findings of this report underline the conclusion that there are substantial training needs in equality and fairness for the majority of those responsible for, or serving in, the fire service. This is in spite of significant inputs, sometimes over a considerable period, in a number of brigades. We believe that it is significant that those brigades that had made that commitment had at least achieved an environment where, as a minimum, people at work had a clear understanding of the expectations of the fire authority in respect of the requirement to comply with policies and procedures.

19.2   We believe that methods used and the style of training have been targeted, intentionally or otherwise, to that end, rather than towards changing attitudes and winning understanding. Indeed, the evidence we received suggested that success in achieving compliance was accompanied by resentment and opposition, with more reasonable attitudes being evident where less, or no, commitment to training existed. This leads us to seriously question the methods of training which are being used and the context in which it is provided. We have not been able to research this issue further but our inspection experiences strongly support gaining a professional insight into the most appropriate means of providing this training. There is currently a void in terms of both training expertise and capacity to deal with the matters raised in this report. There is a particular requirement to increase the confidence of all supervisory staff to ensure these issues become part of the overall management process.

19.3   A means of responding to the training need would be to significantly increase priority given to this in courses run at the Fire Service College or to encourage the involvement of other providers, working to a recognised effectively validated national curriculum.

19.4   Great dependence has been placed on the 'cascade' approach to training throughout the service, with specialist instructor courses used in support of some key topics such as breathing apparatus. We believe that equality and fairness require a radically different approach.

19.5   Experience in the police service where early efforts to achieve high quality internal training in equality and fairness were not generally seen as being successful, indicates that a substantial change in approach will be necessary. The pressures upon internal trainers and cultural responses were such that it has been found essential to provide and facilitate this training through sources outside the service.

19.6   If this opinion is supported by research, there will be a major resource commitment as well as the need to ensure a reliable, professional level of input. The pursuit of these options will require intervention and pro-activity at national level both at the planning stages and when providing resources for these substantial needs. **We recommend that the Equal Opportunities Task Group should consider how planning and provision of training can be supported, as a further priority, and report to the Joint Strategic Committee on Personnel of the CFBAC on the implications.**

19.7   **We must conclude that updated training and information is required by elected members of fire authorities.** Notwithstanding the difficulties explained to us in providing this training in some combined authorities, we hope that, having recognised the need, the authority will be capable of responding to this need. The same requirement exists in respect of chief fire officers and their principal officers. **We would hope that the best means of providing this training be considered by the Equal Opportunities Task Group as part of the work mentioned above.**

Language

19.8   The use of appropriate 'language' really is important. Although it is difficult to be definitive on fine points and in every specific circumstance, it is possible to concentrate on a small number of acceptable words or expressions with would make a significant difference, particularly if the reasons for their preferred use are understood.

There is a clear need for training to address this obvious area for improvement. We recommend that brigades give early attention to improving the understanding of staff of the importance of language.

Working Practice

19.9   With few exceptions there can be little reason not to enable and indeed encourage the full range of flexible working arrangements for all staff providing support, at all levels, to the operational mission. This will help to encourage recruitment from those with family, carer or cultural responsibilities, by removing the bars to entry.

19.10 Within the essential requirement to maintain front line operational service it is clear that more flexible working practices could easily be accommodated. The fact that crewing arrangements on fire stations are already allowing significant differences in the number of staff on duty on any given shift, due to leave, training requirements or detached duties, serves to prove that the needs of individuals could

be accommodated already. The needs of individuals justify proper consideration and these may be greatly assisted by allowing reasonable flexibility in working practice.

19.11 **We recommend that the Equal Opportunities Task Group examine the options for more flexible working practices** on advice from organisations such as 'New Ways to Work, or ' Parents at Work'.

Recognition of Non-Uniformed Staff

19.12 The opinions, views and feelings of non-uniformed staff were of great concern to us. The continuation of such a marked differentiation between them and uniformed staff is difficult to justify, not only on the grounds of the contradiction it presents in the projection of a service which should be committed to the principles of equality and fairness, but also to its functioning and effectiveness.

19.13 We recognise, as do non-uniformed staff, that there are substantial elements of the mission of the operational service, which are the obvious domain of a specialist focused force and that there is a considerable number of activities that only those who have training, skills, aptitude and experience can fulfil. Equally there are many aspects of the functions and responsibilities of the service that are common to a whole range of organisations where other skills and qualification are just as relevant and just as important. The development of fire and rescue services to provide a wider range of services and the complexity of many of the issues that need to be addressed, have not been matched by organisational development or by a recognition of the need for integration of the full range of staff contributors.

19.14 The effect has been to continue conventions originating in the 1940s, which copied the model of Her Majesty's armed forces of that era. We have to conclude that there is an urgent need to re-appraise the importance of uniform.

19.15 In addition to contributing to greater fairness, a change to allow an integrated managerial approach would also enable greater equality of opportunity to those joining the service. In our findings we set out concerns about the glass walls and ceilings which face non-uniformed members of the service. We also referred to the implications of appointing non-specialist uniformed staff to lead or carry out specialist roles, on the basis that as uniformed officers they would be automatically equipped to do so. We have also commented on the disruptive effect this can have. The gulf that these approaches have developed would not be acceptable in other organisations.

19.16 As we have previously acknowledged our terms of reference are restricted to matters relating to equality and fairness but we are sure that those responsible for

the service should re-consider whether such an arbitrary division within the work-force and its management is in the public interest.

19.17 In the context of this review, we believe that a change towards much greater integration offers a number of significant opportunities. We see the artificial demarcation currently in place as reducing opportunity for many who could make a marked contribution to the service. This is as a result of its maintenance of the stereotypes, which the culture we have criticised has encouraged. It is not acceptable that something of minor importance, such as, in this case, uniform, can have such a marked effect.

19.18 Given that we have recommended that the conventions of single tier entry justify examination in the context of equality and fairness, it is appropriate to question the automatic 'eminence' given to uniform in the overall managerial precedence within the service. There are brigades where recognition of the contribution made by non-uniformed staff already extends to third tier status, in some cases directing the non- operational work of senior uniformed staff. These are however in the minority. In others, insertion of uniformed officers to lead all aspects of the brigade's activity is accepted without question.

19.19 There is an opportunity to open up an integrated service to a wider range of potential applicants as well as providing fair and appropriate career advancement opportunities to all within it. Such an approach would have interesting structural implications but could greatly enrich the service, eradicating an unfair, outmoded convention **We hope that the potential for organisation of the service on a multi-disciplinary basis will be examined by the recommended thematic review.**

20   Helping People

Mentoring

20.1   In the light of our findings that there was little evidence of mentoring in support of those in the service that could benefit, we are sure that considerable opportunities exist to make an impact here. The facility to obtain advice and support matched with guidance on personal development is of great reassurance. The availability and commitment of mentors, who can draw upon experience and knowledge and who are willing to help people in this way also conveys a general message. **We recommend that brigades introduce arrangements to provide high quality mentoring schemes for all who need them**. In addition to establishing and advertising these schemes, it will of course be essential to ensure that training and full support is provided to the mentors.

Harassment and Bullying

20.2   In the light of the ready recognition of the continuing presence of bullying and harassment by the wide range of people we spoke with, it is clear that greater attention must be paid to the prevention of the range of bullying being encountered in the workplace. It appears that those brigades that have high status campaigns in place have done much to raise the profile of this, giving greater confidence to those who are at risk by confronting the issue**. We recommend that all brigades have a clear, high profile policy dealing with harassment and bullying of all kinds, together with effective procedures for dealing with cases in a firm but sensitive manner.** There is such a strong level of association with the problems of harassment and bullying in the whole of the workforce that an opportunity exists to link training and the appreciation of all to the experiences of those in the minority.

Support systems

20.3   Although we found a number of good schemes to provide personal support to those who could need it, the lack of such arrangements in other cases is clearly an omission that needs to be addressed. The means adopted do not appear important in themselves. Schemes involving trained volunteers or external consultants were both found to work. What is crucial is that these support schemes are credible, confidential and sensitive to the wishes of those who consult them. It is also important that those providing this service have access to the highest levels of management when necessary and that management responds appropriately to these requests. The schemes themselves need to be properly resourced and supported. It is important that some form of feedback on such schemes is available to management to support the monitoring of the effect of policies. This facility

does not need to compromise confidentiality in any way. It appears that there may be some potential for collaboration between brigades in providing this support.

20.4   The finding that staff are not confident to use the normal chain of management in these difficult circumstances needs due consideration in all brigades.

20.5   **We recommend that all brigades review their arrangements to ensure that staff of all kinds can gain high quality personal help and support in any circumstance when they need it.**

21   Service Delivery

21.1   Although our findings in respect of service delivery were generally positive, particularly in respect of the intention to ensure equitable service to the whole community, there are clearly opportunities to make improvements.

21.2   A significant improvement is necessary to provide monitoring of outcomes of the service delivery process within all sections of the community. This will enable demonstration that good intention is actually reflected in the experiences of all in those communities. This would involve extension of existing good practice to ensure that monitoring of specific incidents or contact with the public are comprehensive. It will also require improvement in relationships with ethnic minority community groups, to include regular and reliable contact. Community customer surveys would also support the monitoring process.

21.3   The other important managerial intervention necessary is to achieve certainty of the understanding of all staff and particularly their front line supervisors, that all members of the community deserve to receive the same levels of service, attention and concern. The particular need here is to ensure that the acknowledged high commitment to non-discriminatory first line emergency response is carried through into all aspects of service delivery and contact, in <u>every</u> community.

22 The Challenge of Community Fire Safety

22.1   The changed role of the service towards support of community safety, with a new emphasis on the prevention of fire and other emergencies, through community fire safety, make it essential to be able to work with the public, in their communities, in ways that engender their acceptance and support.

22.2   This challenge is a considerable one requiring a new culture within the service as well as the accepted change of priorities and working practice. It is not possible to carry through this mission until the service is, and can be seen to be, aligned to and representative of the society it serves. **There is therefore an overriding imperative for the service to move forward to recognise the importance of diversity in every context and welcome the opportunities and benefits that diversity brings.**

23   Final Conclusion

23.1   Everybody connected to and serving in the fire service will see the outcome of this thematic review as a considerable challenge. Its findings and the recommendations for change it contains, go to the heart of a service widely acknowledged as among the most highly regarded of all public services. The weaknesses in respect of quality and fairness which we have identified run counter to the strong service delivery ethos which was encountered throughout our inspections and which is a cause of great pride to fire authorities, members of the service and all of those who support it.

23.2   The negative aspects of the report will be seen by many as having an effect that will be detrimental to the cause of equality and fairness. The inspection team share that concern. We took full account of all of the evidence we collected, coming to the inevitable conclusion that we would fail in our duty were we not to report objectively on all that we found. We believe that all of the people in the service who have suffered under the current arrangements and those who gave us evidence would expect no less. The test now faced is dealing with what has been revealed in a positive and determined manner using the report as a position statement about the past and as a resource for making improvement now and for the future.

23.3   While some of our recommendations, notably those relating to leadership and culture, require more detailed consideration at high level, those dealing with equality and fairness need grasping with the determination and commitment for which the service is justly recognised, at once. The strong message is that the failings are those of omission rather than commission. This means that great progress could be made, and quickly. We are sure it will be.

Failure is not an option.