

EMBEDDING DIVERSITY AND EQUALITY PRINCIPLES WITHIN OUR PROCUREMENT PROCESSES AND DECISIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document has been developed as an integral part of Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service (TWFRS) Procurement Strategy. It documents how we ensure our strong diversity and equality principles are practically implemented through our procurement processes and embedded in the procurement decisions we make. This document shall be used as both a guide for procurers when undertaking future procurements and a record of our achievements. Pre-planned and periodic review of this document, in accordance with the wider review of TWFRS Procurement Strategy, will ensure continuous improvement and development in this area.
- 1.2 Our suppliers are integral to meeting our strategic objectives as a fire and rescue service. Effective processes ensure we procure fit for purpose solutions from third parties, whilst securing value for money for the tax payer. Our suppliers act as an extension to us as a service provider and therefore it is important to ensure stringent supplier selection processes incorporate, and do not compromise, our approach to diversity and equality.
- 1.3 The designing of our procurement processes introduce us to a number of opportunities to further our commitment to diversity and equality. This includes drafting our requirements in a manner that ensures the goods, services and works we procure are suitable for every environment and for use by everyone. It also includes using our influence as a buyer to improve diversity and equality standards within our supply chain by education and careful supplier selection.
- 1.4 To ensure this document and our subsequent approach to procurement delivers practical and tangible improvements and benefits an ambitious action plan has been developed and published within TWFRS Equality Strategy. This action plan is also documented within Appendix A of this document.

2. STRATEGY

- 2.1 TWFRS Procurement Strategy and Equality Strategy are intended to work together to support the objectives of one another. TWFRS recognise good procurement processes compliment and work directly in support of our commitment to diversity and equality. Public sector procurement direct us to treat our suppliers fairly and equally. Furthermore the directives require us to remove any barriers any suppliers may face in bidding for contracting opportunities, particularly Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Black Minority Ethnic (BMEs) and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups (LGBT).
- 2.2 Our procurement processes afford us the opportunity to develop our commitment to diversity and equality both internally and external. An example of internal development includes undertaking equality impact assessments of

our requirements to ensure the goods, services and works we procure are suitable and inclusive. An example of external development is educating our suppliers on diversity and equality to improve standards in our supply chain using our spending power as leverage.

3. PROACTIVELY REMOVING BARRIERS TO CONTRACTING OPPORTUNITIES

- 3.1 An important role of a public sector procurer in the spending of tax payer's, particularly through times of austerity, to is support economic growth. One of the primary ways TWFRS can fulfil this responsibility is by supporting small and medium enterprises (SME's) by removing barriers to them tendering for public sector contracts. TWFRS do this by attending local events organised to bring public sector procurers and SME's together. This allows the procurer an opportunity to understand the difficulties SMEs face in tendering for public sector contracts and allows SMEs to learn about public sector procurement processes. Furthermore TWFRS publish a guide developed to provide suppliers with guidance on how to do business with TWFRS.
- 3.2 In addition TWFRS also recognise the importance of ensuring their supply base reflects the diversity of the Tyne and Wear population. Events are also targeted at improving engagement with Black Minority Ethnic (BME) suppliers and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups (LGBT). TWFRS proactively work to ensure are barriers preventing BME's & LGBT's from tendering for contracting opportunities are identified and removed.
- 3.3 TWFRS participate in events within the North East to provide an opportunity to meet with suppliers and the third sector. These events give procurers an opportunity to educate suppliers and the third sector on their procurement processes and the legislation that governs such processes. It also gives both the suppliers and the third sector an opportunity to discuss with procurers the barriers they face in tendering for contracting opportunities and introduced procurers to potential solutions. Any feedback from these events is considered and is used so TWFRS not only improve their own procurement processes but that of procurers from local partner organisations.
- 3.4 SME's frequently identify the resource required to respond to a public sector tender as a barrier for them bidding for contracts. SME's frequently state the tender process is time consuming, resource intensive and bureaucratic. In response to this TWFRS has worked with regional Authorities and considered Procurement best practices and legislation and made changes to procurement documentation. This has reduced the resource required by SME's to participate in contracting opportunities.

4. PROCUREMENT PROCESSES – DEFINING REQUIREMENTS

- 4.1 TWFRS identify, collaborate and also lead on procurement opportunities and set up diverse focus groups to contribute to the development of specifications. When specifications are completed in draft meetings are arranged with all stakeholders to undertake an equality impact assessment; this approach results in the amendment of draft specifications which informs the contracts.

5. PROCUREMENT PROCESSES – SUPPLIER SELECTION

- 5.1 When sourcing suppliers and awarding contracts of a significant value an investigation and evaluation of a supplier's diversity and equality principles are of primary importance. Contracts are awarded by TWFRS to suppliers with a demonstrable record of achieving high standards in diversity and equality allowing us the confidence that selected supplier will further our own commitment to diversity and equality in the delivery of our contracts.
- 5.2 TWFRS opportunities documentation contains a section on diversity and equality which suppliers are required to complete. This section is pass or fail therefore should a supplier not have sufficient measures in place to demonstrate a commitment to diversity and equality or, should the supplier have poor past performance or convictions in this area, they will not be invited to tender.
- 5.3 When inviting tenders TWFRS also consider whether diversity and equality related evaluation criteria can be incorporated within the wider evaluation process subject to such criteria being relevant to the subject area of the contract.

6. PROCUREMENT PROCESSES – CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

- 6.1 Through contract management and engaging with our suppliers TWFRS identified a need to support our supply base with training and education in diversity and equality to ensure high standards are sustained. Supplier Briefing Days were identified as the appropriate vehicle to achieve this objective. These events will be used to educate our suppliers on their responsibilities and direct them to further support if required. Feedback from our suppliers have led to some of our suppliers seeking to build upon their diversity and equality practices. Due to the success further events are being planned and further communication will continue to be issued by TWFRS to our suppliers ensuring we support them in every way we can.
- 6.2 TWFRS also hold formal contract management meetings with their strategic suppliers. TWFRS approach to contract management includes adding "Diversity and Equality Issues" into the standardised agenda. This will ensure any equality issues associated with the delivery of a contract are addressed. It also ensures that the standards which the supplier achieved to be awarded the contract in the first instance are upheld throughout the contract life.

7. REVIEW OF OUR PROCESSES AND THEIR IMPACT

- 7.1 TWFRS continually review their Procurement Strategy to ensure both the content is up to date and is successfully meeting our organisational objectives. The latest review undertaken amended the documentation used in line with the Public Contract Regulations (PCR2015).
- 7.2 TWFRS also continuously report on their progress against the actions and targets documented within the Equality Strategy.

7.3 TWFRS also review their procurement processes and their impact on an ad-hoc basis to support changes in legislation, to adhere to best practice and to ensure continuous improvement.

8. CASE STUDY

8.1 The brief case study is provided below as one example which demonstrates practical application of our equality and diversity principles through our procurement processes. The case study documents benefits achieved from attending “Meet the Buyer” events.

8.2 TWFRS met the Managing Director of the Environmental Academy, a Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) based locally in Gateshead. The meeting allowed TWFRS to understand the challenges the Environmental Academy faced in tendering for public sector contracts. The meeting identified to the Environmental Academy where TWFRS contracting opportunities were advertised and also familiarised them with the procurement process TWFRS would use. As a result of the meeting TWFRS carefully selected a procurement process which would remove barriers to SMEs tendering for contracts, as identified by the Environmental Academy, whilst ensure the process remained fair and transparent. This resulted in a TWFRS contract with a flexible and responsive SME who delivered a fit for purpose solution whilst allowing TWFRS to secure a healthy financial saving.

9. FURTHER INFORMATION

9.1 Further information regarding this document and how TWFRS use their procurement processes and decisions to embed their diversity and equality principles is available by contacting TWFRS Procurement Department, Service Headquarters.

APPENDIX A – EQUALITY ACTION PLAN (PROCUREMENT RELATED ACTIONS)

Equality Objective & Actions	Responsible Manager & Target Completion	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Evidence of actions completed to date, documents, etc.	Comments relating to the action. Note if slippage or change to target.
1. Review and update equality and diversity criteria into procurement processes and documentation to ensure new contracts are awarded to suppliers that are compliant with the Equality Act 2010.	AM Corporate Support Procurement Services Manager March 2022					Reviewing tender documents, update in line with PCR2015	Ongoing
1.1 Review and amend the Service's tender documents to include appropriate equality related questions to allow effective evaluation of a tenderers compliance with the Equality Act 2010 where appropriate.	March 2022					Reviewing tender documents, update in line with PCR2015	Ongoing
1.2 Ensure processes are in place, for all significant procurements, to identify and incorporate equality and diversity criteria into both specifications and tender evaluation processes.	March 2022					Workplans generated and projects identified.	Ongoing
1.3 Incorporate equality and diversity considerations into formal contract management and supplier performance measurement processes.	March 2022					Ongoing	Ongoing

Equality Objective & Actions	Responsible Manager & Target Completion	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Evidence of actions completed to date, documents, etc.	Comments relating to the action. Note change to target and slippage reasons.
2. Provide suppliers with support and guidance helping them to achieve maintaining compliance to the Equality Act 2010.	AM Corporate Support Procurement Services Manager March 2022						
2.1 Deliver/attend a series of "Equality in Procurement" awareness events/training to enhance knowledge and understanding.	March 2022						Could be impacted upon due to meeting restrictions in place due to COVID19 epidemic.
2.2 Encourage suppliers to access further training opportunities, if required, on their responsibilities with the Equality Act 2010.	March 2022						

Equality Objective & Actions	Responsible Manager & Target Completion	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Evidence of actions completed to date, documents, etc.	Comments relating to the action. Note change to target and slippage reasons.
3. By 2022, continue to review, minimise and remove any potential barriers to Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs); Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) groups in bidding for our contracts.	AM Corporate Support Procurement Manager March 2022						
3.1 The Service to be represented at events focussed on educating SMEs, BMEs and LGBT on successfully tendering for Service contracts.	March 2022 (annual reoccurring target)						
3.2 The “How to do Business with TWFRS” guide is updated and published on the internet.	March 2022					Reviewing and updating where required	
3.3 Equality and diversity principles, the Equality Act 2010 and the Equality Action Plan incorporated with the Service’s Procurement Strategy.	March 2022					Reviewing and updating where required	