



AFSA

Asian Fire Service Association

Conference Report 2009



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Asian Fire Service Association Conference Report 2009

“We are the change that we are waiting for”

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Foreword



Following the London AFSA Conference in November 2008, a critical mass of key individuals came together to explore the potential for creating and sustaining a national body for AFSA. Discussions followed for some time afterwards around AFSA's potential role and ambitions, along with some of the ambitions identified by speakers and attendees at the 2008 conference. Many attendees has suggested that such an approach would be beneficial to the Fire Service nationally, and it certainly had a role in supporting the Service to meet some of its obligations under the equalities agenda, as well as being a scrutiny and consultative body. A healthy addition to the modernisation and development of the fire service from what it was, to what it will ultimately become.

It seems as if, year on year, the pace of change accelerates, without exception, and what seemed a challenging and difficult development, now, looking back, is absurdly obvious as the next step. A “no-brainer”, to coin a phrase.

The 2009 AFSA Conference was a culmination of the efforts of a whole range of people, and as a significant and successful event, it launched the national body, and established the opening for the next phase in the development of AFSA. This report has three purposes; firstly to document the various elements of the two days, detailing the discussions and topics; secondly, to ensure that all the learning from the conference is captured, and can form the basis of continued work for the future; and finally, to act as a watershed in the development of AFSA, and a foundation upon which the future will be built.

Zahoor Ahmad
Chair

Conference Overview

The theme of the conference was Barack Obama's inspirational phrase: 'We are the change that we are waiting for'. This was the first national conference since the formation of AFSA as a national group. However, over the last three years the London AFSA group and their associated membership have established a reputation for supporting the delivery of equality and diversity within the British Fire and Rescue Service, and acting as a support group for staff. The theme of the conference provided an ideal opportunity for AFSA to showcase the work it had been involved in and also to set the agenda for the years ahead.

AFSA have set ambitious objectives for itself, its members and for national events such as the conference. This report outlines and charts the activities and learning undertaken at the 3rd Annual AFSA Conference 2009 and also provides a background to the formation of AFSA, its objectives and successes to date.

The Conference focused on the sharing of best practice, highlighting the benefits that AFSA can provide in terms of supporting its Individual and corporate members, developing skills, experience and knowledge that individuals and Fire and Rescue Services can use to meet equality and diversity aims and objectives. In addition the conference brought external speakers to share experiences and to provide motivation and inspiration that we can do and that we do not need to wait for others.

AFSA, having increased its capacity over the last 12 months, developed from a Shadow Committee to a formal National Committee. Over the course of the last year AFSA has been able to add value to the work currently being undertaken in respect of equality and diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service and has gained commitment



from all levels. It is important to note that the conference also reflected the members desire to celebrate the achievements of both individuals and the national AFSA Committee. Finally the AFSA committee wishes to acknowledge and commend the increased membership, both individual and corporate, whilst retaining its emphasis on developing this further over the next 12 month.

Following a year of successful activity, AFSA's 3rd Annual Conference truly celebrated the hard work and achievements of its committee and membership. It was noted how AFSA's reach and influence at a national level enabled a wealth of talented and committed individuals to join and contribute to its aims and objectives. Acknowledgement was given to the founder members (Manjit Singh, Parvinder Singh, Akwala Deol and Davinder Sodi) and current committee members without whom the conference would not have been made possible. The membership of AFSA continues to represent the vast span of religions and cultures from across the Asian diaspora. However, membership continues to be open to all those committed to advancing AFSA's aims and objectives. It extends an invitation to join to everyone who shares these beliefs, regardless of their background, culture, religious or other personal belief, including those with no belief.

AFSA reported on its charitable objectives, the support for which had generously funded a range





of charitable activities. Over the last three years AFSA have made significant donations to charitable causes, in particular to McMillan nurses and the Asian breast cancer awareness campaign (a charity that has been adopted as one of the main charities for AFSA). In addition, AFSA have also made donations to the Afghanistan Sikh Centre, the Asian school in Southall and donated fire engines to Pakistan and Tanzania as well as delivered training to firefighters in Tanzania. At this year's conference AFSA were able to raise £2,500 at the celebration dinner for a water wells project in India, McMillan Nurses, the Indonesian earthquake appeal and a local elderly home Apna Ghar. Further money has been raised post-conference by Billy Gill for the water wells project. We will keep members aware of progress on this exciting project.

Hosting the conference in Birmingham enabled many more from the UK to attend over the course of the conference and delegates reflected upon Birmingham being a welcoming, diverse and cultured City. The Venue was perfectly placed to host the conference, workshops and evening celebration.

AFSA demonstrated its widening influence by attracting private and public sector sponsorship.

The panel debate brought a range of experts together to take questions from the floor. The main focus of this was a discussion around sustainability and the potential to work more closely together as partners on common themes to make swifter and sustainable progress by attracting greater funding opportunities.

Over the two days delegates benefited from a range of inspiring workshops and speakers covering topics as diverse as Positive Action programmes to the long debated facial hair issue. Delegates participated in discussion and debates that's brought together a wealth of experience, knowledge, and passion. The learning points are captured further into this document.

The evening program was truly a celebration of Asian culture and achievement. With music and entertainment from Harvey Sahota and Stephen-Remell Coleman from the London Fire and Rescue Service, Gurjaran Mall- Dhol Blaster and Jay Kumar delegates were soon out of their seats enjoying Bollywood Dancing to the full working up an appetite before indulging in some spectacular Asian cuisine. The auction and raffle that followed raised an ambitious £2,500 for a number of deserving causes. The auction was followed by well deserved AFSA awards were presented to all the worthy recipients ranging from the founder members to Fire and Rescues service that have supported AFSA to the charitable organizations who have helped AFSA deliver on its charity objectives. Telent were also recognised for the corporate sponsorship and advice and support that they have provided over the last two years.

The conference closed on day two with a motivational presentation and workshop given by Simon Clarkson who challenged us all to consider how our own beliefs and values influenced our actions and decision making and how this may impact on others or how others values and beliefs may impact on us. In his unique and interactive style delegates participated in a variety of exercises which led them to understand these patterns of human behaviour in an informal but challenging way.

The conference was captured throughout in a range of mediums. Tim Hoy the official photographer who's photographs can be found on WWW. And the AFSA website the conference demonstrating yet another new talent to the Fire and Rescue Service the artist Graham Ogilvie who listened to every spoken for the entire word and translated this in to vivid and imaginative graphic cartoons. The images produced by Graham have been used to produce a conference report in picture as well as to illustrate this main report. Delegates were asked to comment on the images over the two days as they were displayed in a gallery style around the Second City Suite. Finally delegates selected the images they felt best conveyed the key messages of the conference and these have been collected together to form the AFSA Conference 2009- A Conference in Pictures which we hope will be enjoyed for years to come.

Summary

Following a welcome and introduction, Zahoor Ahmad and Jagtar Singh gave a short history of AFSA and its vision for the future.

Key Speakers:

Vijith Randeniya
CFO, West Midlands
Fire Service

Vijith Randeniya became the first ever Asian Chief Fire Officer when he took up the role of West Midlands Fire Service. Vijith shared with delegates his personal journey, the various secrets of his career, and the importance of ensuring the Fire Service is seen as a credible career option for the Asian Community.



John Bonney
President, Chief Fire
Officers Association
(CFOA), and CFO of
Hampshire

As President of CFOA, John Bonney pledged continued support for AFSA, and focussed on the moral case for equality and diversity. He outlined the challenges for the future, the need to retain an equalities focus and develop confidence in its exercise. It was in developing good practice that AFSA could certainly contribute.



Shahid Malik MP
Parliamentary Under-
Secretary of State for
Communities and
Local Government

Shahid Malik MP, the Fire Minister paid tribute to Jagtar Singh and Vijith Randeniya as pioneers, he praised the conference for it's timeliness as it coincided with Interfaith Week and reinforced the significance of how AFSA and CLG had shared goals and aspirations for improving the diversity of the workforce and delivering the very best service for the public. He recognized AFSA as a national partner that had made remarkable progress in a very short time and he commented that this was due largely to its leadership, membership, and clear objectives.

His speech instilled confidence in delegates as they heard how he also had personally overcome



the barriers he had faced as he followed his own career path overcoming them all by a sense of determination, humour and confidence in his own ability. He reflected on what had helped him achieve this success: hard work, determination, self-belief, infectious optimism, and he urged delegates to take up opportunities to apply for positions and promotions!

He praised the positive action campaigns that are underway to attract young women and individuals from BME backgrounds to the Fire and Rescue Service and he hoped that this would be supported further with the High Potential Leadership Programme. The minister thanked AFSA members for their support and commitment for these campaigns and also for the Fire Kills Campaign which had won the Civil Service Award 2008.

A panel session followed to discuss the role of staff groups, how they are sustained and the ultimate impact they can have. The panel was made up of key figures from staff groups within the Fire and Rescue Service, the Police and the NHS.

Workshops ran through the remainder of day one and day two. Key workshops included a vast array of topics from Leadership to Asian history, and Development Programmes to Facial Hair.

The conference included a "Celebration of Diversity" dinner on the evening of day one, which included an awards ceremony for a range of contributors and friends who had support AFSA's development.

The conference closed on day two with the inspirational speaker Simon Clarkson, who explored how experiences and perceptions shaped decision making.

Conference Report



The conference was opened by Zahoor Ahmad, AFSA Chair and Jagtar Singh OBE, National Advisor to AFSA.

Jagtar welcomed all delegates and speakers to the event in his role as National Advisor and MC for the conference.

Delegates received an overview of AFSA's history and heard an outline of AFSA's vision for the future. This had developed from the answers to the

following three questions asked by the Chair: Firstly, is there a groundswell of support for a national association? Secondly, is that sustainable? Thirdly, so what? Zahoor stated there had been clear and total commitment for AFSA to be a national committee and acknowledgement was given to members around the country who had given their time to attend the monthly meetings throughout the year. Their commitment demonstrated just how AFSA would be sustained. Zahoor summarised some of the key benefits of AFSA's existence so far as follows; - developing individuals, assisting the Fire and Rescue Service to meet aims and objectives in respect of equality and diversity, engaging with stakeholders and members on key issues, networking and sharing of notable practice and celebrating the success and achievements of individuals and Fire and Rescue Service's

Zahoor shared AFSA's unofficial motto, adapted from a saying by Edward Everett Hale: "I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. The something I can do, I will."

Jagtar reiterated the need for AFSA to 'get things done', to be a committee that delivers something tangible and to continue to be a driving force for positive change. Its success would mean improvement for all staff and communities improving the experience for some would greatly benefit the experience for all.



Speakers:



Vijith Randeniya

Chief Fire Officer, West Midlands Fire Service

Vijith Randeniya Chief Fire Officer, West Midlands Fire Service opened his presentation by celebrating the City of Birmingham in its own right.

Vijith shared with delegates his personal journey of his professional success and in so doing highlighted the importance of the Fire and Rescue Service as a significant career option for BME communities comparable to those other traditional roles such as medicine and law. He challenged traditional thinking with his presentation which included some images of his wife in traditional clothes and also in her professional role as a senior police officer. Together they are provided examples of role models for the Asian community in what are seen as non traditional jobs for the Asian community. By promoting the achievements of uniformed Asian members of the service we can ensure that the uniformed service are seen by young Asians as place were they have a place and they can succeed by merit, hard work and a little bit of luck. Vijith was keen to press home the point that irrespective of any defining characteristics of race, gender, disability, or sexual orientation people could succeed in the service by adopting a positive attitude, working hard and achieving excellence

at work. He said he did not believe in favourable treatment for any of the strands but only wanted the best people to work in his brigade which he hoped would be seen as the very best in the world.

He then went on to give an overview of his personal journey, recounting some of the challenges he had overcome on the way to becoming the first Asian Chief Officer in the Fire and Rescue Service. This included not telling anyone he was a university graduate and he described how for him the lack of parental support he had experienced had been a key driver for him. He introduced us to his wife's experience of being a Sikh police officer. He explained his pride in wearing his uniform but the values that lie behind that being of vital importance. He felt it had assisted him in networking with other agencies and that this allows him to lead from the front which is something he also enjoys and values enormously. He is currently pursuing a personal fitness challenge of reaching the top of Mount Snowden wearing full breathing apparatus. We wish him well with that!



John Bonney
President Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA)
and Chief Fire Officer Hampshire Fire and
Rescue Service

John pledged the continued support from CFOA stating they were a proud partner of AFSA that they shared common aims and were engaged in a grown up dialogue. He focused on the moral case for equality and diversity highlighting to do otherwise was a betrayal. He said you cannot promote your service to be accessible to all when you know they really are not and that Fire and Rescue Service could rethink its approach to the agenda to ensure progress can be made for example in achieving a diverse workforce that is reflective of the communities served. He felt that we need a professional confidence to deal with equality and diversity and that people must not feel intimidated as the public deserved culturally competent services of the highest standard. He also focused on the financial challenges to achieving progress but stated this should not be a distraction or a reason to stray from your commitment as diversity adds value when it is embedded in everything you do. In closing he outlined the value of AFSA as a source of good practice, debate and influence and presented the challenge of remaining unique whilst broadening your support base. Concluding he urged delegates to 'do the right thing' adding we can, we have and we will do!



Shahid Malik MP
Parliamentary Under-secretary of State for
Communities and Local Government

Building on the theme of the conference he reminded delegates and Fire and Rescue Service to take up their responsibility for this agenda in order to replace the culture of tolerance to one of sustainable and positive acceptance.

The Fire Minister said that the Fire and Rescue Service has a central role to play in tackling inequality, promoting opportunity, and improving fire safety to bring down accidental fires in all communities and emphasised the Government's commitment to support local communities, saying:

"The Government's role is to ensure that all our communities are well served, that there are no special privileges and no special interest groups - just fairness. Our citizens have a right to influence the services they receive and have a say in how those services are delivered.

"The Government is committed to working with the Fire and Rescue Service to ensure that we have an effective, modern service where all staff and the public are treated with dignity and respect.

"We look to the Fire and Rescue Service to fully play its part in the delivery of effective services to all. Of paramount importance is the way in which the service engages with the communities it is responsible for protecting - ensuring that the vulnerable in our communities understand the



importance of fire safety and are not left out is vital.”

The Minister also called on all members of England’s Fire and Rescue Service to play their part, working with local community partners, to make sure that progress on service delivery and equality is communicated to local communities. He said:

“I want to thank the members of the Asian Fire Service Association who have joined the campaign to encourage people from different backgrounds to consider a career in the Fire and Rescue Service, as they can speak from experience of the great job satisfaction and career opportunities that the service has to offer.

“We know from the Fire and Rescue Service itself that it makes a difference, as communities trust a Fire and Rescue Service that reflects their community’s own diversity.”

The Government wants to encourage more girls and young women to become firefighters - and it wants people of all ages from minority ethnic backgrounds to consider the Fire and Rescue Service as a career choice for them. A new Government led campaign is starting to roll out to show that ordinary people can have extraordinary careers in the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Asian Fire Service Association (AFSA) is a networking and support group set up to provide professional advice and support on matters affecting Asian members of the Fire and Rescue Service in the UK and to promote fire safety in the Asian community.

He also thanked Jagtar personally for his tireless commitment to equality and diversity within the Fire and Rescue Service.



Panel Session Chaired by Zahoor Ahmad



The Panel consisted of:

Samantha Samuels, FBU Executive and national BME Members (B&EMM) Secretary

Duncan White, Chair, National Disabled Fire Association (NDFA)

Tim Hoy, National Diabetics Association

Maskeen Ali, West Midlands Police and Chair of the Muslim Police Association

Julie Foster, Unison Branch Secretary West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service

Yvonne Coghill, National Programme Lead, Breaking Through programme, DoH

Glynn Morgan, Chief Executive, Fire Officers Association

Question 1:

**How sustainable are your organisations?
Where does your funding come from?**

The FBU is self funding, members contribute, B&EMM is funded from the organisation, and BME members contribute so they should receive some benefits.

Unison is funded by the members; we are required to provide opportunities for BME members to network.

Breaking Through is funded by Department of Health (DoH) with a remit to develop talent amongst BME staff similar to the fire service's High Potential Development Scheme. The statistics show that across the NHS there is 220,000 staff of which 17% are from BME backgrounds and across 350 organisations there are 5 Chief executives from BME backgrounds. The scheme is a positive action programme.

For the Police the Chief Constable provides funding for the Muslim Police Association as he is committed to having the association however this is dependent on delivery from the Association.

The National Diabetics group is unfunded and supported by goodwill. Time invested by its members has provided the service and individuals with some excellent advice over many years and helped to retain talented staff and avoid expensive legal cases.

NDFA does not currently receive any money from membership but did receive £10k from CLG as seed funding; NDFA are currently working with AFSA and Networking Women to see how they are funded. It was felt that Fire and Rescue Services could and should fund the NDFA as well as the National Diabetics Association, as both have and will continue to support individuals and services to avoid expensive employment tribunals. This alone should warrant support.

All panel members agreed that it would be useful to work together on common issues and work to seek joint funding for some research and other work

Delegates were informed that AFSA membership is free to individuals, but a charge is made for Corporate Membership.

AFSA were also pleased to confirm that all Fire and Rescue Services have been approached and consulted regarding corporate membership and that many had already joined as corporate members. It was pleasing to note that all Welsh Fire and Rescue Services have joined and both CFOA and the CLG have been very supportive through the development phase over the last twelve months.



Question 2:

So What? What is the impact of your organisation? What benefits does it bring?

The benefit of support groups in the police include ; someone to talk too, empathy with issues, opinions and advice, assistance for service managers- shared experience help all

There are lots of networks within the NHS, across all the strands of diversity and they are funded by the organisations themselves e.g. The BME Networks holds the NHS to account, commitment comes from the top, white colleagues understand the benefits and are asking to be able to get involved in Breaking Through

Unison and B&EMM confirmed that the Trade Unions are held to account by the membership and by Black and Asian members. Criteria for membership is open, the value to members is that they have collective support because in the course of their work they are dispersed. The networks are member organized and run by BME trade union members. B&EMM have executive membership on the national FBU board and are able to exert additional pressure by having an elected full time official.

All the panel members summarised by saying they felt that they were able to work on the individual, organisational and community level as and when required, with a view to add value to service delivery, staff welfare and provide a body for consultation for the services to work with partners who share our aims and we have proven our worth.

Summary of Workshops

Several workshops ran side by side throughout the two days. This section provides a summary of discussions, including and learning points, and where necessary any follow-up actions.

Members Workshop: AFSA Vision and Activity

The aim of this workshop was to help delegates to understand better the role and development of AFSA and to support AFSA to build a clear vision and business plan. AFSA is divided nationally into the fire service regions. The workshop assembled each regional group, allowing members and interested individuals to discuss progress and priorities. The regional chairs will be taking forward the key lessons and ideas of how each AFSA regional group can develop and how they interface with the national group.

All regions will report back the outcomes of the workshops at regional meetings over the next 12 months and then at next years conference.



Workshop A1: Leadership – The Missing Link

Amit Poppet, E&D Policy Manager, Southend Hospital NHS Trust

Amit introduced the session by speaking about the importance of Leadership in driving the equality and diversity agenda and the challenges this can bring and what should leaders be doing to promote equality and diversity.

Key Learning

- First lesson in Diversity is to be self critical.
- We need to overcome barriers of discomfort and apprehension
- Remember managers get paid to implement diversity
- Challenge discrimination from a sound knowledge base is key
- Diversity is measurable on three levels following the PCS approach (devised by Neil Thompson):
P= Personal C= Cultural S=Structural
- The Legislative, Moral and Business Case for diversity should always be integrated into any approach. This knowledge base will then direct activity and challenge appropriately.

Workshop B1: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Lives Positive Action Programme

Gill McManus and Erin Richardson CLG

Aim: To provide information to AFSA Members on CLG positive action programmes

Key points from the session:

- This presentation allowed delegates to view a promotional DVD that was being delivered within schools, designed to increase and encourage BME applicants.
- The Equality and Diversity Strategy 2008 is available on CLG website together with first annual report May 2009.
- Project Samantha- a positive action programme for young women promoting careers in Fire and Rescue Service.

- Identify resources that would assist Fire and Rescue Service to engage locally
 - Toolkit
 - Shared experiences and learning
 - Extranet/Intranet provision
- Ideas for future working
 - Review failed applications and consider focus groups with candidates
 - More cross-cultural visits and engagement
 - Work with Asian Media



Workshop C1: Developing a Common Understanding of Asian Culture

Manjit Singh, Essex Fire and Rescue Service

This workshop main focus was to raise awareness around what is actually meant by the term Diversity. In particular recognising the diversity of the Asian community, and developing a working understanding. The session also asked some interesting questions i.e. how do you manage and work with diversity on a day to day basis? How do you explain culture? Building on some

notable practice from The National Ambulance Service Association who had produced guidance some time ago about around the different faiths and cultures, AFSA would like to produce a similar document with a view to it becoming a toolkit for good practice nationally.

Learning points

- Develop resources and toolkits e.g. pocket sized culture and religion reference book that can be easily updated
- Include a notes page so learning can be captured
- Incorporate different learning styles in to the resources e.g. use of images
- Ensure that new and emerging communities are included
- Train the trainer resources would also be useful
- An overview of Islam generated increased awareness of the associated values and beliefs

Workshop A2: Identifying inequalities in Service Delivery

Gurch Randhawa – Chairman of Luton and Dunstable PCT

Gurch explained some of the background to the NHS approach to mainstreaming services. Lord Desai is proposing a greater emphasis on quality in measuring NHS performance. He placed great emphasis on consultation with the public and the need to recognise local communities and the issues that affect them. He described the communities as 'the power base and can be organisational arms to control'.

He described the remit of World Class Commissioning – this is about improving health outcomes and reducing health inequalities and having more practice based commissioning. This means making services fit for purpose and doing things differently. This approach is required in response to research that shows how a number of communities face health inequalities. The evidence suggest some communities face particular barriers, have reduced access to services and poor experiences and this results in poor health

outcomes e.g. reduced life expectancy or high numbers of people from one group experiencing Heart Disease.

Key Learning

- What is mainstreaming?
 - Vision/language
 - Engagement
 - Challenging conventional thinking
 - Consult with the public and leaders
 - Creativity
- Leadership is paramount
- Support lean thinking
- Tailor services to meet the needs of users
- The collection of data is important to establish working effectively.
- Have a long term business model and meet expectations
- We must challenge conventional thinking and we need to overcome these challenges
- Have optimism
- Work together and provide support



Workshop B2: Special Development Programmes

Yvonne Coghill, NHS, Chris Callow and Kate Calder, Fire and Rescue Service

Aim: an opportunity for members to find out more about the High Potential Management Programme and the Breaking Through Campaign

Breaking Through

Background

- NHS workforce consists of about 1.3 million employees
- 61 years of BME staff = 15% BME employees
- NHS has 500 Chief Executives Nationally, but only 5 from BME Backgrounds

Purpose

- Senior Leadership to reflect the community
- Foster talent
- Produce talent and leadership guidance to ensure a systematic approach talent management
- Remove barriers to enable more leadership positions to be filled by clinicians, people from BME backgrounds, women and people with experiences from beyond the NHS

The Programme

- Top talent programme lasts up to 18 months
- Transformational Leadership programme up to 6 months
- Strategies towards success (5 days)

Challenges

- Restricted in those who can access the scheme.
- Current tests have shown that BME staffs are scoring higher than graduates.

Fire and Rescue Service High Potential Scheme

Background

- The programme currently allows for a mix of 70% BME and 30%white



Purpose

- Attracting and developing future leaders
- One approach does not fit all. Staff with higher potential can develop and progress more quickly
- Makes use of expertise and ability more quickly
- Fire and Rescue Service becomes a career choice for new entrants seeking leadership/managerial careers
- Builds capacity and leadership foundations for the future
- Supporting increased diversity at all levels
- Improve public awareness of the Fire and Rescue Service as a career choice (particularly important regarding the profile amongst underrepresented groups)

The Programme

- There are 13 Fire and Rescue Service who will be involved in the pilot programme. They are: West Midlands, Staffordshire, Hereford & Worcester, Warwickshire, Cheshire, West Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Humberside, Wiltshire, Cambridgeshire and Devon & Somerset
- There will be approx 40 to 50 candidates in total.
- The HPLP will be for existing Fire-fighters or Crew managers and new entrants. There will be a selection process to follow.
- New entrants will go through the selection process then spend 18 months in development, followed by:
 - 12 months as a Crew Manager development
 - 12 months as a Watch Manager development
 - 9 months as a Station Manager development

Workshop C2: Developing a Common Understanding of Culture

**Delver Virdee and Harvey Sahota,
London Fire Brigade**

Aim: to explore the barriers to engaging with BME communities and how they can be overcome

Delegates considered the issues that may result in barriers and focused on solutions that would



improve outcomes for BME communities based on the work of London Fire Brigade Community Action Team.

Key Learning Points:

- Barriers and myths exist on both sides
- Dispel myths around career and service provision
- Consider your method for communication and engagement
- Identify who the communities are
- Overcome geographical boundaries and dispersed communities
- Offer incentives and share the benefits
- Dual purpose events e.g. sign people up for smoke alarms at recruitment fairs

**Workshop A3:
'Facial Hair a Barrier to Far?'**

Paul Hayden, CFO Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service and CFOA subject lead, and Jagtar Singh, AFSA.

Aim: to explore a national issue that has been challenging the Fire and Rescue Service

A lively and informative debate explored the issues around facial hair and the wearing of breathing apparatus for operational staff.

Jagtar argued a case for taking a risk assessed approach that took account of the religious needs of staff who may not to be clean shaven and to take account of the legal cases that have been won by Sikhs in the construction industry and for the wearing of helmets on motorbikes. He also highlighted the anomaly of requiring this absolute standard of being clean shave against the enforcement of the standard which was at best loosely upheld and at worst not used comprehensively.

Paul Hayden argued that the issue has been robustly researched and the service has many health and safety issues as well as European and British standard the prevent progress on the matter.



The key points from the debate were:

- The health and safety issues were deemed to be the biggest barrier to finding a solution
- An alternative to a face mask is possible but funding is not available from CLG or CFOA to pursue a technical solution
- The AFSA view is that funding can always be found if we have the drive and leadership to seek a solution and agreed to support CFOA to find funding.
- Some of the myths and facts around facial hair where discussed and consultation had also been undertaken with the Sikh Consultative Forum to try to find a solution
- The policy for facial hair should be impact assessed and a cultural/ religious solution should be sought
- The national procurement strategy should include this as a key issue and report back the findings
- Delegates asked whether there is evidence that all uniformed officers need to comply to this requirement
- When asked, many senior officers had not worn a BA set at an incident for over 15 years.
- The standard needs to be assessed to establish a clear position (which has been impact assessed for health and safety and equality). Once established, this needs to be applied consistently across the service.
- AFSA undertook to support CFOA and write to the Minister about this issue

Workshop C3: The History of British Diversity

Karen Chouhan, Equanomics UK

Aim: In celebration of Black History Month to find out more about Asians in Britain

Karen gave a very informative guide to the history of diversity in Britain and celebrated the achievements and contribution of BME people in everyday life e.g. sport and popular culture, politics.

- Research evidences the disadvantage faced by BME groups e.g. CRE Legacy report 2007
- Equanomics UK - Working for race equality via economic justice
- History of Asian firefighter's i.e. who was the first Asian firefighter?
- Use of Language can be powerful. Karen used some interesting mnemonics for everyday equality, and reflected on the lessons of history:
 - C - Challenge; cohesion, citizenship
 - I - Interrogate; Integration, Islamaphobia, Institutional
 - D - Deliberate; DNA Database, Diversity, Discrimination
 - Rely on our R's-Rights, Responsibility, Research, Respect, Records, Restorative justice
 - Encourage the use of 'E's-Equality, Employment, Economic Equity, Evidence, Efficiency, Empowerment, Enforcement and Equanomics



Keynote Presentation



I Want To Be the Best That I Can Be **Simon Clarkson**

This was a motivational presentation that identified how experience and perceptions can impact on your decision making. The presenter engaged widely with delegates and challenged their thinking and perception with a variety of entertaining and informative exercises.

Key Comments from Attendees **from the Two days:**

- AFSA has an important national role which has now been recognised
- Let's rock boats!
- AFSA can work with communities- what is the best way forward?
- Need local actions to follow
- Sharing knowledge and experience is invaluable
- AFSA is inclusive and welcoming to all
- Provides a safe place for individuals to speak
- Clear passion to serve communities
- Commitment from CFOA and senior management
- We need more role models
- Nothing is impossible
- I would feel comfortable approaching AFSA with issues
- Self belief
- What a talent pool there is
- Can improve representation of underrepresented groups
- Networking has been brilliant
- Inspirational
- I am clear of what I can do
- Time for action
- Overwhelmed at the response to the conference
- Dedication of members
- Be focused, committed and enthusiastic
- Good practice from other Fire and Rescue Service and partners
- Good to know about the extraordinary people campaign
- AFSA can be the tool for cultural change
- Still a long way to go
- Achieved so much due to hard work
- We must have a productive year
- Lets take Fire and Rescue Service into 21st Century, my service is behind a lot of what I have heard today
- We can deal with complex issues and they must be dealt with
- Positive attitudes and energy- we are fantastic!
- I m impressed with AFSA and its achievements
- There are solutions for everything
- It's a long journey...it has been tough and it's going to get tougher!

Final Comments



Any conference has a whole range of direct and indirect benefits, both for the present, and if we are fairly successful, we are able to build a sustainable platform for the future. It is this second area that remains with us, and that establishes whether these events happen again.

The conference launched AFSA as a national body, and drew a vast variety of attendees from across the Fire Service. With this type of mixed audience, AFSA managed to provide an excellent programme of diverse input, catering for differing interests as much as it possibly could. Regardless of the individual attendee's personal interests or position within their organisation, it was important that everyone finds something useful and able to give them ideas they could take away with them. Having such high profile speakers as the Fire Minister and the President of CFOA brings its own advantages. Not only are we able to listen to the thoughts and messages that they bring, but also the challenge they bring to each other and the attendees. We had a very interesting debate about membership of right-wing groups, as well a general agreement around the importance of equalities, and the role groups such as AFSA have in overcoming barriers to progress and focusing the agenda.

It is in this focusing activity that the AFSA conferences are at their strongest. We are able to bring to the fore some very difficult and challenging topics, such as breathing apparatus and facial hair, and are able to have a mature, pragmatic and progressive debate that will hopefully direct us towards a solution in the future.

Far more than that though, it demonstrates what an impact a group of like-minded people can have. By taking the slogan "we are the change we have been waiting for" we managed to prove to ourselves that that impact is not only momentary but, looking forward, it is a sustainable force, focused in its vision, active in its mission, and inclusive in its approach.

It is amongst the foundation of stones upon which the future of AFSA will be built, but we should guard always against complacency. As CFO Bonney pointed out, there are always challenges ahead, and we must adopt, retain focus in such times that will ultimately be the truest test of AFSA's success.

It would of course be remiss of me not to thank all those that made such a varied and intense event possible. The quality of the speakers, the organisation in the background, and the attendees on the two days who provided such an interesting level of challenge and debate. A special thanks to Jagtar Singh, whose incredible enthusiasm and endless energy remain an inspiration to us all.

Zahoor Ahmad
Chair

Useful Links

Extend your understanding of diversity issues and their proper management with these useful references and web links. The issues covered include business, ethical, social and legal aspects of the topic.

The Equality Authority

www.equality.ie

The site of Ireland's Equality Authority, which has replaced the Employment Equality Agency and works to enforce legislative requirements throughout the country, as well as to promote the business and cultural benefits of compliance.

Equality and Human Rights Commission

www.equalityhumanrights.com

promoting equality and human rights, and creating a fairer Britain. Provides advice and guidance, working to implement an effective legislative framework and raising awareness of peoples rights.

National Disability Authority

www.nda.ie

This national body assists in the research and development of disability policy and reform. The site offers some useful links in relation to disability issues.

Age Positive

www.agepositive.gov.uk

A new site provided by the British government, and working as part of a new initiative to create age-diverse workforces that will have a positive impact on the bottom line. Vital reading for today's diversity professional.

Diversity Resources

www.diversityresources.com

This site offers useful information on the value of diversity for your client base, as well as some valuable resources on cross-cultural team-building.

South London and Maudsley NHS Trust

www.slam.nhs.uk

One of the UK's largest trusts, SLaM has taken radical steps to manage diversity within its patient group and staff.

Diversity Inc.

www.diversityinc.com

A commercial site providing a range of useful material, including articles and case studies, which can be accessed through a monthly subscription.

Business in the Community

www.bitc.org.uk

This membership organisation looks at corporate social responsibility. Its homepages include a link to 'Opportunity Now', which aims to work with employers to realise the full potential of women at all levels and in all sectors of the workforce. Its site contains interesting diversity statistics.

Diversity Best Practices

www.diversitybestpractices.com

A member service for diversity practitioners, accessed by subscription, this site includes a range of information on diversity issues, and also explores benchmarking activities.

Working Balance

www.workingbalance.co.uk

Public sector site focusing on working life and work-life balance issues, and including a substantial and helpful section on diversity. It distinguishes nine different types of discrimination, and looks at case studies and recommendations.



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