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REPORT OF RESEARCH

~ FOR ~

HOME OFFICE

~ CONCERNING ~

**STRATEGIES FOR THE RECRUITMENT AS FIRE
FIGHTERS OF WOMEN AND PEOPLE OF AN
ETHNIC MINORITY BACKGROUND FOR
WEST YORKSHIRE FIRE SERVICE**

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BACKGROUND TO THE C3 CONSULTING RESEARCH REPORTS

In May 1999, West Midlands Fire Service approached the Home Office for support for a study to investigate ethnic minority views on the fire service as an employer, with the aim of implementing a recruitment advertising strategy that would improve its record on ethnic minority recruitment. Following a presentation on the proposed study by Corporate Communications Company, (now renamed C3 Consulting), the Fire Policy Unit and the Fire Research and Development Group, agreed to support the West Midlands study financially. The study was completed and the Corporate Communication Company's report produced as FRDG Publication 4/1999, which was circulated under Fire Service Circular 12/99.

Following on from this initial study, it was decided to commission C3 Consulting to undertake similar studies in two other brigades, having different mixes of ethnic minorities to West Midlands. This would add to information already obtained and help to confirm or otherwise, the relevance of the West Midland's findings to the fire service at large. The locations chosen for these studies were West Yorkshire Fire Service and Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. The studies were completed in February 2000 and the C3 Consulting reports are published as FRDG publications as follows:

FRDG Publication Number 2/2000: Strategies for the recruitment as fire fighters of women and people of an ethnic minority background for West Yorkshire Fire Service.

FRDG Publication Number 3/2000: Strategies for the recruitment as fire fighters of women and people of an ethnic minority background for Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

FRDG Publication Number 4/2000: Strategies for the recruitment as fire fighters of women and people of an ethnic minority background.

FRDG 4/2000 contains a comparative analysis of the results from all three studies.

Human Factors
Fire Research and Development Group
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THE OBJECTIVES

TO UTILISE THE METHODS DEVELOPED AND PILOTED IN WEST MIDLANDS IN ORDER TO:

IDENTIFY THE BARRIERS TO RECRUITMENT FOR SUITABLE WOMEN APPLICANTS AND PEOPLE FROM AN ETHNIC MINORITY BACKGROUND FOR TRAINING AS FIREFIGHTERS.

INFORM THE DEVELOPMENT OF RECRUITMENT EXERCISES WHICH CREATE AND LEAVE A POSITIVE IMAGE OF THE FIRE SERVICE WITH ALL APPLICANTS.

METHODS USED

In order to progress this research the following has taken place:

I. BRIEFING SESSIONS

A briefing meeting between Pam Culley, Home Office Fire Policy Unit (HO), John Dackombe (HO), Chris Gooderson (HO) and Lou Jones, C3 Consulting (C3), Bill Gardner (C3), Richard Stone (C3).

A briefing meeting between Jim Manuel, Chief Fire Officer, West Yorkshire Fire Service (WYFS), Hilary Brown, Administration and Personnel Manager with responsibility for equal opportunities monitoring (WYFS) and Pam Culley, John Dackombe, Bill Gardner and Richard Stone.

II. PREPARATORY RESEARCH

An analysis of information summarising the 1998 recruitment campaign.

An analysis of the demographic make-up of West Yorkshire.

Identification of potential community contacts.

Review of background information on West Yorkshire Fire Service including:

- The most recent report of HM Fire Service Inspectorate (1999)
- The 1997/98 Annual Review.

III. FOCUS GROUPS AND COMMUNITY CONTACTS

The research consisted primarily of seven Focus Group meetings:

Two Internal Focus Groups

- i) Firefighters (White Men, White Woman, Ethnic Minority Man)
- ii) Senior Officers (White Men)

Five External Focus Groups

- i) White and Asian (Women) - Bradford

- ii) Asian (Men), Black (Men and Women) and Iraqi (Man) - Huddersfield
- iii) Asian (Men) - Leeds
- iv) Asian (Men and Women) - Bradford
- v) Black (Men and Women) - Leeds

(C3 wish to acknowledge the help and advice given by Phil McNeill in setting up the Focus Groups in West Yorkshire).

A total of 63 individuals participated in the Focus Groups. Two people expressed an interest in joining the Fire Service but they did not want to pursue this at the time.

To encourage an open debate and free expression of views, opinions and attitudes, it was agreed that comments made at Focus Group sessions would be unattributed.

A number of organisations were contacted in the process of setting up Focus Group meetings. These included womens' groups, community and education centres, voluntary service organisations, leisure and employment resource services, a Race Equality Council and an urban regeneration partnership (see Appendix 1).

This provided additional opportunities to explore issues identified during the research. The information gained has contributed to this Report.

A Career Fair/Open Day for the Manningham and Girdlington area of Bradford – which was attended by approximately 300 young people, local employers and community help groups - was also visited.

Community consultation was significantly hampered by the coincidence of Ramadan (9 December 1999 - 8 January 2000) and the festival of Eid together with the Christmas and

Millennium celebrations during the period in which research was taking place.

BACKGROUND

50 Fire Stations in West Yorkshire (including 35 whole time) serve more than 2,000,000 people in an area which combines heavily populated, industrial urban centres with large rural tracts.

Five District Councils combine to form the Fire Authority.

Approximately nine per cent of the population are from an ethnic minority background. In urban centres, this figure is often closer to 20 per cent. The percentage of people from an ethnic minority background in the uniformed strength is below one per cent.

Over the last decade, there has been an increasing awareness of the need for the workforce to reflect the diversity of the community it serves and for the organisation's commitment to equal opportunities to be visibly delivered in practice.

At the same time, year-on-year budgetary savings have been required which has effectively curtailed recruitment. This has clearly constrained the ability of the Service to address the diversity imbalance.

However, it is far from clear that any action taken would have been successful. In a 'one off' campaign in 1998, 97 per cent of applications were from white men. Recruitment from this exercise has yet to take place but the shortlist of successful applications is exclusively white males.

WYFS is keen to explore ways of attracting more interest in its vacancies from women, black and Asian candidates. It has been working with Race Equality Council representatives and schools in West Yorkshire and has met with community leaders and careers advisors.

A Community Outreach Worker post has also been created to develop and maintain links with the minority ethnic communities in the area and to provide information and guidance on career opportunities.

FINDINGS

INTERNAL FOCUS GROUPS

The current workforce has been predominantly recruited via local mainstream press advertisements or by direct approach. Having family or friends in the service was a source of encouragement, advice or information for many (such as, being told when and where to look out for vacancy notices). This has contributed to the perpetuation of an un-representative workforce.

Employees were attracted by the variety, “*excitement*” and teamwork nature of the job. The terms and conditions; security; pension; salary; “*equality of opportunity*”; hours which allow a second job and the social culture were also important.

WYFS is seen as a “*good*” employer.

Firefighters are well-trained, confident and proud “*to belong*”.
Retention is high.

WYFS is perceived to have an open and equal culture with no issues concerning racism or sexism. The general opinion is that a black, Asian or woman recruit would not encounter any problems.

The one woman who took part had been successfully recruited after a ten week pre-entry course which had encouraged her to pursue an application.

There is concern about positive action targeted at the recruitment of women and ethnic minority groups. The Firefighter group felt that this was unfair to white men, including those in their own families. *"They have every chance to apply. If they don't...so what"*. Fear was voiced that pressure to recruit black, Asian and women applicants could lead to their selection ahead of *"better"* white male candidates. It was felt that if there was a dilution of the selection process, this would have implications for the quality of the Service – *"Standards may slip"*. Longer serving Firefighters thought entry tests today were easier but more recent recruits convinced the group that this was not the case.

The Officers felt that the issue of targets had been poorly presented in the past – which was creating difficulty concerning current efforts. They were also concerned about positive recruitment action. This was based upon doubts about the legal restrictions on such exercises. Problems were anticipated in “selling” positive action to existing Firefighters.

At the Briefing Session, the Chief Fire Officer had put a clearly argued case for greater workforce diversity. There was some understanding of this in the Officers’ group but less in the Firefighters’ group. A minority of the Firefighters could see potential benefits in a more representative workforce - particularly in the wake of the recent abuse of Fire Teams attending an incident on 5 November 1999. Others saw a poor level of integration of minority ethnic communities in society at large as the root problem. The view was expressed that this is a problem for society - not the Fire Service who are simply suffering from “*an excess of political correctness*”.

There was a general acceptance in both groups that the community initiatives undertaken by WYFS (including talks with ethnic community elders, using Asian press/radio media, leafleting women’s fitness centres, etc.) have failed to break down barriers.

However, some activities are seen as helpful (i.e. community contacts in schools - particularly with younger age groups (year 5) - careers events and Station Open Days).

The public image of the Fire Service is seen to mainly come from TV where programmes - particularly "*London's Burning*" - are seen as creating a favourable impression.

But both groups felt that there was a general lack of public awareness about the job of a Firefighter, including the requirements of applicants and the range of work involved.

Recruitment and information literature was felt to be of poor quality.

The militaristic, parade ground drill style of training was felt to be outdated and a potential turn-off for some applicants. Other barriers mentioned were the workload, the uniform which might have negative authority associations linking the Service with the police and the level of discipline. Some felt that suitable black, Asian and women candidates might be put off by an unfounded fear of discrimination.

Reasons proposed for a lack of Asian applicants included that they were precluded by a caste system; discouraged by the perceived low status of the job; by handling bodies; an involvement in dirty work; and have a cultural imperative to be self employed. These reasons indicate a lack of informed cross-cultural awareness of minority ethnic communities.

SUGGESTIONS MADE BY INTERNAL FOCUS GROUP
PARTICIPANTS

- Allocate more resources to the recruitment effort.

- Use existing black, Asian and women Firefighters in face-to-face recruitment/ awareness raising in the community. If such Firefighters are not available within WYFS - recruit “outreach” workers.

- Promote the Service with high profile black, Asian and women “*champions*”.

- Improve the design, content, layout and overall quality of literature to “*back-up*” recruitment exercises (the West Yorkshire Police recruitment pack was cited as a good example).

- Explore collaborative working with the range of task forces already actively working with community groups (such as the SRB - funded Positive Action Team).

- Talk to parents, religious leaders and those with influence in ethnic minority communities as well as directly to potential applicants in order to build support for the Fire Service as a career.
- Target areas of high black and Asian unemployment for recruitment exercises.
- Pilot the use of an external recruitment agency to out-source the task/ *“problem”*.
- Establish an *“after sales”* team to leave a positive image with those who have failed the recruitment process. Currently there is no feedback given because of the *“fear of being challenged”*.
- Recruit collaboratively with others (such as the police and HM Forces).

- Pool resources with other Fire Services on regional level recruitment exercises to gain wider and more cost effective publicity for the opportunities available.
- Use computerised initial selection to remove all chance of bias.
- Focus selection on important interpersonal skills (i.e. communications and being a “*team player*”) not on form filling. It is important to note that the initial sift rejects candidates on the incorrect completion of application forms.
- Provide additional support such as coaching or training to enable selected applicants to meet test requirements.
- Review appropriateness of all selection, testing and training procedures.
- Ensure better “*selling*” of job opportunities to the target groups. There is criticism that the current advertisements undersell the job in an effort to limit the overwhelming responses that are always received from white males.

EXTERNAL FOCUS GROUPS

I. ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES

WYFS has a generally positive and professional image with ethnic minority communities but a low profile. It is seen as an emergency service with limited community contact whilst the Police Force is seen as much more visibly active in the community. Youth Centres have frequent, informal visits by plain clothes Police Officers and trips to Police Stations take place.

Whilst the majority of those who took part in the Focus Groups do not believe that the Fire Service discriminates, a significant number see a lack of minority ethnic communities and women represented in the Fire Service as an indication of a degree of sexism and racism. There is some scepticism that positive recruitment efforts are more about “*tokenism*” than about achieving real change.

Participants do not like the idea of being the only black, Asian or woman in a team – *“It’s not worth the effort and the hassle to succeed. You have to be twice as good. There are better alternatives”* and emphasised the need for support structures to ensure retention in such circumstances.

There is little factual awareness of the range and scope of a Firefighters job. The active nature of the work appeals to some. For others it is seen as *“dangerous”*.

Perceptions of the Fire Service are influenced by TV, where fictional series such as *“London’s Burning”* have created a more favourable image than documentaries. Most participants had never seen a recruitment advertisement – *“What recruitment?”* - or heard of any information-giving events. One individual who had seen and responded to an advertisement had been discouraged by the odds against success with large numbers in competition for a few vacancies.

Many Muslims have a traditional view of the home and family responsibilities of women. The elements of risk and danger coupled with the shift-working involved in a job as a Firefighter conflict with this orthodox domestic role. Muslim women said that they would face opposition from their families if they were to consider the Fire Service as a career.

Asian men stress the importance that is placed on education in their communities. Because a job as a Firefighter is largely seen as a manual job without longer-term prospects, parents were likely to actively counsel against it as a career option. A few also voiced the opinion that, on average, Asians were physically slight and at a disadvantage in strength assessments.

However, it is interesting to note that it would appear that attitudes in Asian countries, such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh were said to be more advanced with women employed in the Fire Services and the job enjoying high status.

There is a distinct difference in cultural attitudes between the generations in Asian ethnic minority communities. Those below the age of 24 are distanced from the cultural allegiances of their parents and much more “*westernised*” in their outlook. For some teenage participants seeking to differentiate themselves from their parents’ generation, status and a high job profile were important factors in choosing a career. Public service of any description was not high on this agenda.

SUGGESTIONS MADE BY EXTERNAL ETHNIC MINORITY
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

- There should be pre-recruitment and preparatory “*tasters*” to raise awareness of entry requirements.

- Use and recruit from the full time, two year public services courses which prepare young people for a career in the public services.

- Introduce a help-line for careers information.

- Use black, Asian and women Firefighters to promote the job from personal experience directly to small groups.

- Increase community involvement by regular calls by Firefighters to community centres (not in uniform) and organised visits to Fire Stations.

- Develop much more extensive contacts with schools in order to provide young people with greater information on careers in the Service.
- Provide work placements developed in conjunction with Careers Services.
- Launch a campaign aimed directly at parents and the wider community to explain the full range of duties - including fire prevention and community education - using ethnic minority languages in the verbal media (i.e. inserts in popular Bollywood movies).
- Produce, and make widely available, a careers information video to be used by the Service directly, by Careers Advisors and other relevant organisations. The video should show the full range of work undertaken by Firefighters; include black, Asian and women Firefighters; briefly cover the assessment process and be backed up by information packs.

- Place advertisements and articles in local newspapers (such as the Huddersfield Examiner and in specialist press/radio - Asia Net; AWAAZ; Eastern Eye; ZEE-TV; Sunrise Radio; Sky TV and cable channels.
- Emphasise the community care and fire prevention aspects of the job.

II. WOMEN

There were three key decision times for the participants in this Focus Group - making choices as young children; preparing for work during school/education and building a career on entering the world of work.

Most had pre-conceived and stereotypical ideas about jobs when making early choices. They were influenced by their parents' jobs and by practical experience – from shopping, travelling, doctors, teachers, visits to industrial or business sites, open days, work experience exercises, careers events, etc..

With personal confidence being an important issue in pursuing career choices for all the women represented, positive encouragement from family and teachers was an important motivator. The group agreed that it was easy to be turned off from non-traditional or un-conventional choices when young and that role models - or the lack of them - was a significant influence.

A lack of good careers advice was reported by most of the women. They saw this as a real barrier to widening choice. The Fire Service had not featured in advice to any of those present when making choices and no-one was sure how they would have discovered details of the opportunities.

All the women had experienced difficulties connected to sexism and discrimination in the workplace. They agreed "*It happens everywhere*". In recruitment, it was apparent from in-appropriate questions such as "*Are you married?*" "*What does your husband do?*" "*What does your husband/family think of ...?*", etc.. Those who had experience of applying for a job which did not normally attract women applicants had been asked "*Why?*" and made to feel defensive.

Socialising and team working were the two main areas of difficulty for women in a male dominated environment. Women said that this was difficult for the men as well as the women and it put pressure on managers and trainers to handle situations with sensitivity.

“You’re either isolated or one of the lads - no in between.”

“If you are friendly they think you are fancying them: if you keep to yourself you’re stuck up!”

“In a male dominated workplace you have to prove yourself. So you try extra hard and are labelled a swot. If you’re successful it’s either seen as favouritism or sucking up. You can’t win so you tend to withdraw.”

The women also found it difficult to handle teasing in a male dominated work environment.

“You either ignore it, laugh it off, or you get paranoid thinking “Are they talking about me?””

One woman had left a job where she was the only woman because she felt isolated and the problems that this led to were not recognised or dealt with.

Two girls who had left school at 16 with few qualifications found their options limited to office junior, shop assistant *or* “*shelf filler*”. Both said that they would have been keen to pursue a career in the Fire Service at age 18 if they had known about the opportunities.

The group agreed that the early days in a new job and initial training are the most difficult in a challenging or testing environment. This is the key time when extra support and confidence-building are likely to be necessary.

The group listed the following reasons why they believed more women did not apply for Firefighter vacancies:

- An overall lack of interest in the nature of the work.
- An inability to meet the physical requirements (strength; height; fitness level; unaided eyesight standard; climbing ladders, etc.).
- Put off by the “*macho*” image, but linked this with the “*hunk*” perception of a Firefighter as an idealised “*fantasy man*”. Therefore, subconsciously, “*not a job for women*”.

- The culture and social aspects involved in male team “*togetherness*”.
- Being the only woman - or one of a few.
- Contractual terms (i.e. inflexible hours, shifts, on call, etc.).
- Working conditions.
- Uniform – “*big boots, helmet and axe*”.
- Danger aspects.
- Needing to have the right disposition (i.e. “*brave*”, “*gung-ho*”).
- Influence by press reports of discrimination in Industrial Tribunal cases.
- Careers advisors, teachers and parents advise women against applying because “*vacancies are limited*”; “*its hard to get in*” and “*you can do better*”.
- It is a difficult job to reconcile with family life (because of the hours, the danger, etc.).

SUGGESTIONS MADE BY EXTERNAL WOMEN FOCUS
GROUP PARTICIPANTS

- Better careers guidance.

- Publicise successful women Firefighters either in case studies, videos or face-to-face at careers events/jobs fairs.

- Obtain positive PR for the “good employer” practices of WYFS and build on this reputation by offering - and publicising - flexible working practices, career breaks and family friendly policies.

- Provide more readily accessible information about the job specification and the requirements of applicants.

- More clearly targeted marketing - make it clear that women applicants are wanted.

- Give support through training to build confidence and ensure that trainers are able to recognise and handle problems as they arise. This was because the Focus Group believed that training women and men together and creating an essentially “inclusive” training environment required a different approach than when dealing with single sex groups.
- Make available trainee options for women entrants at 16.
- Provide careers advisors with realistic case study material that women can relate to.
- Encourage careers advisors to shadow Firefighters or do work placement with WYFS to build their knowledge of the extent of the role.
- Hold women-only Open Days, assessments and training courses.

- Invite interested women to local presentations where they can find out more and be reassured about meeting the requirements before beginning the application process.
- Use the national press such as the Daily Mail and Daily Express and local radio, posters at fitness centres and the internet to advertise vacancies.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTED ACTIONS

1. All change is challenging. It should not be undertaken without a clear purpose. Much that is “traditional” may be symbolically important, (i.e. to team spirit and morale) and this needs to be taken into account along with judgements based on purely practical grounds.

2. C3 believe that a creative blending of tradition and change is possible. One of our key recommendations is that the Service sets out its **Core Values in simple statements of principle** covering the job (safer communities, achieving “best value”, etc.); the people (valuing diversity, respect for individuals, etc.); leadership behaviour and communications. A copy should be carried by all employees at all times when on duty in a wallet with the Fire Service Star (US Police Department style). Values must be clearly meaningful and relevant to doing an excellent job in today’s Fire Service.

3. It is also important to define the “**rationale for diversity**” in as simple and straightforward a manner as is possible. Everyone needs to understand what WYFS is trying to achieve in terms of diversity and why it is crucial. A **question and answer brief** should be compiled for all those likely to be involved in media relations.

4. Opportunities should be pro-actively exploited to publicise aims and good news stories.

5. An **Action Plan** should be drawn up setting out the range of measures through which diversity is to be achieved: community initiatives; public relations and media related campaigns; positively targeted recruitment exercises; open days; careers events etc. The targets set by the Home Secretary should be built in to the plan as a quantitative measure of progress but, importantly, not the reason for taking action. Diversity is about qualitative improvements.

- 5.1 Because there is no quick fix to profile - improvement, it will be helpful to incorporate some **short term objectives** which can be achieved and publicised. These may, of necessity, have to be about processes rather than outcomes (i.e. holding community events/meetings, gaining press coverage for aims or about the review of equal opportunity policies). Early successes and good news stories will build confidence and commitment.
- 5.2 'Buy in' will be increased by involving as many people as possible. There should be **regular and planned communications**, either written or cascaded verbally via line managers which reinforce the case for diversity and **each individual should be made aware of their role and responsibilities** in delivering the Action Plan.
- 5.3 The Action Plan should be realistically costed and backed by investment if it is to stay the course. This means **commitment to the plan by the Home Office and the Local Fire Authority**.

With competition for scarce resources, spelling out the rationale for diversity is the first step in making the business case for the necessary, long term investment.

- 5.4 A **future Recruitment Plan**, one year in detail and ten years in outline, should form part of the Action Plan. It should relate to succession planning and turnover based on an age and service profile. It should also take account of the opportunity which will arise when WYFS need to recruit above average numbers of Firefighters to replace retirees resulting from the additional recruitment that took place when changes in hours-of-work were introduced.

6. **Recruitment and application handling procedures should be reviewed** to enable a positive response to suitable candidates throughout the year. A rolling programme of recruitment will be more effective than the high risk, high resource strategy of a one-off, annual exercise. An on-going programme to build up a **bank of names and addresses of interested applicants from target recruitment groups** will enable different recruitment methods to be tested and changed where necessary. It also gives the flexibility to link in to local events or national campaigns (i.e. International Women's Day).

7. One interesting proposal was to contract out recruitment with an external agency. This may bring some specialist expertise into play but could be seen as an abdication of responsibility. It also carries the danger of further isolating the Fire Service from the community it serves. C3 believes that an active collaborative partnership with selected intermediaries will give a route into communities and is a better approach than distancing WYFS from the solutions to the problems it faces.

8. **A pre-recruitment course** should be developed and piloted in conjunction with a community based training provider in order to help to build relationships with target groups and produce suitable candidates for direct recruitment. Places should be limited to meet the opportunities likely to become available. The opportunity for challenge, teamwork and to improve physical fitness should be promoted as added benefits for potential recruits as well as the chance of a job.

9. **Existing procedures should be reviewed** for their relevance in a modern Fire Service which now has a focus on education and fire prevention in the community. Early days in a new job and initial training are the most difficult - a time when extra support and confidence building are likely to be necessary. **A programme of action** (i.e. line manager support, access to

advice, mentors, help lines, etc.) to ensure retention must accompany plans for recruitment.

10. Consideration should be given to the need for **additional training of Trainers** to enable them to recognise difficulties and diffuse situations as they arise in order to support ethnic minority and women recruits in the early days of initial training. A militaristic “bullying” style of training is not attractive to some candidates. As a technique it undoubtedly builds a high degree of pride and subordinates personal agendas to internal group loyalties. However, it may also be one of the reasons why the existing culture is so embedded and hard to challenge. Firefighters are inducted into a “*corps*” or force which separates them from the community.

11. **Publicity material should be urgently reviewed.** A staged approach is necessary to attract attention, encourage interest and allow an element of self-selection. An eye-catching, short “grab” leaflet and poster is suggested with “up front” messages about the wider role and rewards of a Firefighter’s job - fire prevention; helping the community; team work; technical skills; career structure; security and benefits. Distribution should be directly targeted through community centres and in areas of high ethnic community population. The copy should make clear that

applications are particularly welcome from ethnic minority communities and give a contact number for further information which should be available either face-to-face or as an information pack. The more detailed information pack should cover entry tests and requirements but again include an invitation to discuss issues before making a final decision.

12. Recruitment requirements for WYFS are for relatively small numbers. Well planned, intensive community events, exhibitions and face-to-face contact supported by good quality information packs, Open Days and a rolling recruitment programme should be more than sufficient to encourage suitable applicants in manageable numbers. Media activity should be limited to community public relations (background information aimed at improving the image of the job with the whole community - not just potential recruits, good news stories, promotion of aims and on-going work to ensure equality of opportunity) in local, general papers and in national specialist press such as The Voice and Eastern Eye.

13. **Face to face contact using black, Asian or women Firefighters or outreach workers** is likely to prove most effective at conveying the appropriate messages. Clearly, resources will limit such activity but it will be worth spending time to get intermediaries such as Jobcentre Managers, Youth

Leaders, Community Project Leaders and Training and Careers Advisors to positively “sell” the Fire Service. Discussions should also take place with all involved in giving careers advice both in schools, colleges and in the local Careers Services. There may be a local careers advisory network which can be accessed in a planned way and regular contact maintained. This may make it possible to determine what advisors are saying about the Fire Service; tackle misconceptions; identify resource materials which are being used and what additional help and information is needed in order to advise people about jobs as Firefighters (i.e. would they use a web site for information? Are they aware of the Service’s aims to recruit more women and people from an ethnic minority background?, etc.) **Careers Advisors should also be invited to visit Stations, shadow Firefighters and experience the job at first hand.**

14. It is vital to build informal community contacts through a **planned programme of exhibitions and follow up visits** to community centres, youth clubs and schools and by holding more Open Day events.

15. **Independent recruitment panel members** drawn from the ethnic minority community should be considered. This would:
- Reassure and encourage applicants.
 - Recruit an influential advocate for WYFS.
 - Establish a channel of communications into the wider community.
 - Provide advisory input on procedures and identify any unconscious discriminatory practices.
 - Assist in giving positive feedback to unsuccessful applicants.
 - Independently confirm the overall fairness and objectivity of the assessment processes.
16. **Additional support and training should be provided for ‘near miss’ candidates** from target groups to help them reach the necessary standard. Clear feedback should be given to unsuccessful candidates to explain where they failed to meet the required standard.
17. It is clear that once the numbers of women and ethnic minority firefighters increase that there will be a change in the public’s perceptions of the Service. However, it would be helpful if

existing Firefighters from minority groups could be used in publicly visible roles - selling the Firefighter role from personal experience. **As an interim solution, specialist outreach workers should be used to build relations in the community.**

18. **All Firefighters should be encouraged to be pro-active advocates for the Fire Service** with target groups. Inter-personal skills and objection handling training should be provided together with resource materials (i.e. leaflets with contact numbers for obtaining further information) to support this role. Time should be allowed/ diarised for community contact to take place.

19. **The introduction of appropriate family-friendly employment options** should be considered. Encouragement and publicity concerning the taking up of options by men and women would also be helpful. These could include:
 - Job sharing.
 - Child care benefits option.
 - Sponsored child care places/play schemes.
 - Career breaks.

- Enhanced maternity leave.
- Help-line service.

20. There should be exploration of the idea of **links or a “twinning” arrangement with a Fire Service in the Caribbean or Indian sub-continent.** Cultural and information exchanges could produce both practical benefits and good publicity.

LIST OF CONTACTS

Action Sport - Leeds

Al Hickma Centre - Batley

Bangladeshi Centre - Leeds

Bangladeshi Women's Centre - Bradford

Bradford College - Bradford

Bradford Innovation & Business Centre - Bradford

Careers Bradford Ltd. - Bradford

Cathedral Centre - Bradford

Chapelton Community Centre - Leeds

Council for Voluntary Services - Bradford

Huddersfield Technical College - Huddersfield

Job Placement Link - Huddersfield

Kirklees Race Equality Council - Huddersfield

Leeds College of Technology - Leeds

Manningham & Girdlington Regeneration Partnership - Bradford

Palace Project - Leeds

Prince Philip Centre - Leeds