



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority

CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Agenda Item No:

Date: 22 February 2013

Purpose of Report:

To present to the Fire Authority a consultation framework for all future Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service consultations and to seek adoption of the framework by the Authority.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services in England sets a key priority for Fire and Rescue Authorities to be “accountable to communities for the service they provide”. In respect of meeting this requirement there is a specific requirement in relation to consultation around the Fire Authority’s integrated risk management plan (IRMP).
- 1.2 In particular the Framework states that the Fire Authority’s IRMP “must reflect effective consultation throughout its development and at all review stages with the community, its workforce and representative bodies and partners.”
- 1.3 Whilst IRMP is an important and pivotal process by which the Fire Authority engages with the public, the changing environment in which the Service now operates means that the Service may have to consult on more specific aspects of changes to service delivery in future years. Therefore it would be wise now for Members to agree a consultation framework with which Officers can operate to ensure all expectations are met.
- 1.4 To ensure compliance, the Policy and Strategy Committee approved the establishment of a Member-led task and finish group to establish a consultation framework at its meeting of 2 November 2012.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 The task and finish group met to look at the impact of the National Framework on Consultation and also considered the Code of Practice on Consultation issued by the Government in July 2008.
- 2.2 As an outcome, a draft document has been produced entitled the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority Consultation Framework. This document was then forwarded to Opinion Research Services (ORS) for professional comment and review. ORS hold a central contract for consultation with the Fire and Rescue Service Consultation Association (FSCA).
- 2.3 The document was amended slightly and returned to the Member-led group for final scrutiny and comment at a meeting on Friday 11 January 2013, before presentation to the Policy and Strategy Committee on 1 February 2013, who recommended it be forwarded to the full Fire Authority for adoption. The final agreed document is appended to this report.
- 2.4 With the Service due to commence consultation on its next Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP+ in spring 2013, it is important that Members of the Fire Authority have confidence in the process being undertaken. By agreeing the adoption of this document the Fire Authority should have that confidence.

- 2.5 The document itself is also based upon the seven principles of consultation set by Government, so will also ensure that any processed conducted will stand up to external scrutiny.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Fire Authority has an annual budget set aside for consultation processes, and depending on the nature of any in-year consultation, this will be reviewed. For 2013/14 and the IRMP process, the Service has identified an additional £50k.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are no specific human resources or learning and development implications arising from this report.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

Any consultation process and strategy will need to demonstrate that the Authority has engaged with all sections of the community.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The duty to consult the public is contained with the National Framework which is issued under Part 3, Section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. Although this specifically relates to IRMP, effective consultation will serve to demonstrate accountability to communities.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

Effective consultation mitigates risk to the Fire Authority in a number of ways, but specifically:

- Demonstrates to the Secretary of State accountability and engagement with the community, thus removing the risk of Ministerial intervention;
- Reduces the risk of legal challenge, such as judicial review, over any proposals and changes the Authority may make as a result of consultation.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members adopt the framework as the basis for all future Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service consultations.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

Frank Swann
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority

CONSULTATION



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
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Creating Safer Communities

FRAMEWORK



January 2013



CONTENTS

FOREWORD	3
CONSULTATION CRITERIA	4
1. WHEN TO CONSULT	5
2. THE DURATION OF OUR CONSULTATION	6
3. THE CONTENT OF OUR CONSULTATION	7
4. THE ACCESSIBILITY OF OUR CONSULTATION	8
5. THE COST OF CONSULTATION	9
6. OUR RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION	10
7. OUR CAPACITY TO CONSULT	11
APPENDIX A	
CONSULTATION OPTIONS	12



FOREWORD

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to effective, fair and accessible consultation with the public, stakeholders and its staff. Above all, consultation should be targeted towards the communities we serve and should be easily accessible.

Effective consultation helps inform the decisions that the Authority may make with regard to the provision of fire and rescue services throughout our City and County and there are requirements within the National Framework to consult effectively on our plans throughout their development, and at all review stages. Our plans must cover a minimum three-year time span and effective consultation properly includes the community, our workforce, representative bodies and all partners.

Our planning process is an opportunity to have an on-going conversation with communities. This transparent approach will ensure we are accountable to those whom we serve.

Chair of Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Consultation Group

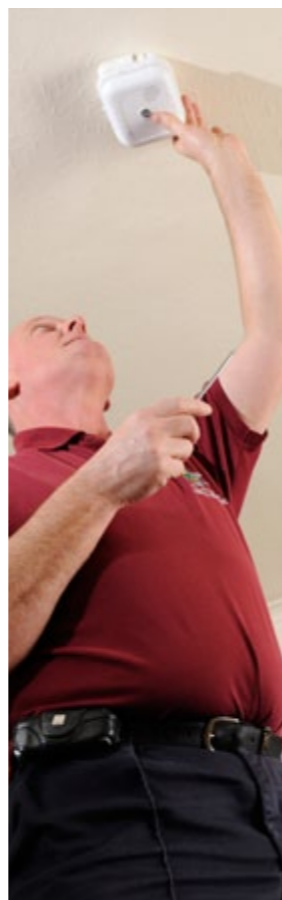
CONSULTATION CRITERIA

Our consultation criteria are based upon the seven consultation criteria set by government in its Code of Practice on Consultation (July 2008).

This framework allows us to decide:

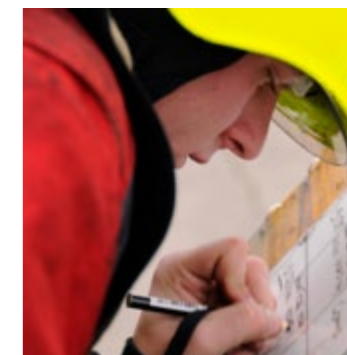
1. When to consult.
2. The duration of our consultation.
3. The content of our consultation.
4. The accessibility of our consultation.
5. The cost of our consultation.
6. Our response to the consultation.
7. Our capacity to consult.

This document lays out the way in which we will address all of these issues.



1. WHEN TO CONSULT

- 1.1 Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority will consult whenever its decisions with regard to the Fire and Rescue Service are likely to have a direct impact on the public.
- 1.2 Formal consultation will be an important stage in any policy making process and will be undertaken by one or all of a range of methods in order to open decisions to scrutiny and allow for the gathering of additional evidence to inform the Fire Authority.
- 1.3 It may be necessary to engage in early 'informal' consultation with members of the public, key stakeholders and/or employees to gain initial evidence and to gain an understanding of any issues which may arise. This will always be a prerequisite to any consultation and will not replace formal consultation.
- 1.4 Depending on the nature of our proposals or the issues, we may choose to consult more than once and by any one or more of a range of methods. For example, we may consult widely on a policy decision, but then consult again on a more local basis if any decision made may have an impact on a particular area. We may use qualitative and/or quantitative methods – the former to include focus groups, forums and in-depth interviews, and the latter to include various forms of 'survey'. Consultation is not a 'numbers game' in which only quantitative methods count.
- 1.5 We will try to avoid running our consultations during periods where responses may be affected, eg: political elections, holiday periods etc. If we do have to do this, we will take account of the impact and adjust our processes accordingly.



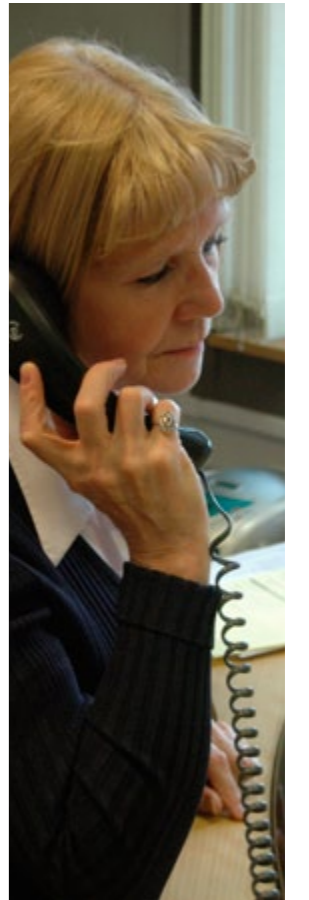


2. THE DURATION OF OUR CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Under normal circumstances consultations will last for up to 12 weeks and sensible consultation periods will be factored into our planning processes to allow for the widest possible relevant engagement. It will also allow for us to digest and respond before deciding on any final plans.
- 2.2 If a consultation has to take place over a period where consultees are less able to respond (eg Christmas) or if our proposals are particularly complex, we will give consideration to extending the consultation period.
- 2.3 For consultation to reflect the issues and timetable available, we may choose to use one or more of a range of different approaches, including websites, media, social media and other quantitative or qualitative options. Due to the need to inform the Authority's decisions with considered inputs, we attach importance to 'deliberative' or 'dialogue' methods of consultation through focus groups and forums.
- 2.4 This range of methods should ensure that the public, stakeholders and staff have the widest range of options to express their views.

3. THE CONTENT OF OUR CONSULTATION

- 3.1 Our consultation processes will be clear about the reasons for our consultation, what our proposals are, and how our public and stakeholders might be affected.
- 3.2 We will state how the consultation will run and what we will do with the information we gather.
- 3.3 Where possible we will provide options, costs, benefits and additional information to help support our consultation processes. An equality impact assessment will be undertaken with regard to any of our proposals to ensure transparency.
- 3.4 Where an equality impact assessment might reveal a particular issue for a certain section of our community or stakeholders, we may engage in a more detailed process with that section of the community. The method of consultation will always be chosen to reflect the needs of the target communities.
- 3.5 Any questions asked will be as clear as possible. A mixture of open and closed questions will be used and consideration will always be given to offering consultees the opportunity to express views not specifically addressed in the questions.



4. THE ACCESSIBILITY OF OUR CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Our consultation exercises will be developed to be as accessible to, and targeted at, those people who are affected by our decisions and for whom the consultation is intended to reach.
- 4.2 We will ensure that our consultation exercises use an appropriate range of methods and are designed and targeted accordingly. Where consultation exercises need to reach a diverse audience, several approaches may be required.
- 4.3 In our consultation documents, it will always be stated in what ways people can participate.
- 4.4 As far as possible our consultation documents will be easy to understand. We appreciate that some of our proposals may contain technical information and 'jargon' that is not clear to our wider audience. Where this is essential we will provide glossaries and explanations as to the terminology we use.
- 4.5 Our approach to the dissemination of information will be pro-active, and we will give consideration to producing alternative versions of documents when requested – eg, audio, Braille, alternative languages.
- 4.6 A list of options available is contained in Appendix A of this framework.



5. THE COST OF CONSULTATION

- 5.1 When preparing for our consultations we will have to consider the burden and cost on the organisation.
- 5.2 If some information is already in the public domain via our website or other publications, then we may refer people to that option.
- 5.3 Our broader use of social media will also help to keep costs down, however we will not rely on this option alone because of the requirement to achieve a more representative approach.
- 5.4 The budget assigned to generic and specific consultation will be available for public scrutiny through our accounts and our on-line transparency reporting.



6. OUR RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION

- 6.1 All responses to our consultations will be considered. It is impossible for us to formally acknowledge every submission, however, they will be fed into any decision making process.
- 6.2 We may choose to provide a general summary of who responded to our consultation and the summary of views. For example, significant comments may be singled out as part of our reporting process.
- 6.3 The outcomes of all consultation involving the public will be formally presented to the full Fire Authority at one of its meetings where decisions relating to the consultation will be made.
- 6.4 Consultation detail will also be précised and published in line with our consultation document.



7. OUR CAPACITY TO CONSULT

- 7.1 Where possible, we will always seek to contain our consultation exercise as an 'in-house' process in order to keep costs down.
- 7.2 However, where such a consultation will place a burden on the organisation that will affect our normal day-to-day role, or where independent design, facilitation or reporting are required, we will seek expert external provision to assist us.
- 7.3 On occasions where we require additional support, only those providers who meet our requirements within this framework will be contracted and we will take a best value approach.





APPENDIX A CONSULTATION OPTIONS

(This list is not exhaustive and not in order of priority)

- Written documentation
- Political briefings
- Website publication
- Intranet publication
- Written reports within formal meetings
- Forums – with the public, stakeholders and/or staff
- Media briefings
- Newspaper coverage
- Radio airtime
- Leaflets
- Social media
- Business breakfasts
- Focus groups
- Letters and correspondence
- Visits to key locations
- Adverts
- Arrow Magazine



