

## report

meeting	<b>NOTTINGHAMSHIRE AND CITY OF NOTTINGHAM FIRE AUTHORITY</b>	
date	<b>26 MARCH 2004</b>	agenda item number

## REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

### LOCAL RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN - COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

#### 1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The development of a Local Risk Management Plan (LRMP) is one of the most fundamental changes to the fire service within the last 50 years. The reasons for this change, and its impact, will need to be communicated clearly to all audiences to ensure maximum positive support for the LRMP and the broader modernisation agenda.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to summarise, for Members, the strategic needs, process and implementation of the type of communications programme most likely to succeed.
- 1.3 Currently there is the need to develop a strategy that will allow fast, effective and consistent message delivery as a means of creating confidence in the programme of delivery, as well as assisting the management of change.

#### 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 In-line with the development of the draft year one LRMP, it was recognised that an appropriate communications process needed to run in tandem with its implementation. As a result of discussions within the Strategic Management Team, a consultant from Proteus Public Relations Ltd, was appointed to advise on the development of a Communications Strategy.
- 2.2 Discussions on an appropriate strategy continued, coordinated by the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and included the Fire Service Corporate Communications Advisor. It was readily identified that an effective approach would incorporate, not simply an initial communication process to run alongside formal consultation on the draft LRMP, but needed to establish a consistent long term approach aimed at alignment with the post launch implementation programme.
- 2.3 This report forms the outcome of the evaluation of the strategic communications needs of Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS) in relation to the implementation of the first year LRMP and the communication /change management process that will underpin its effective delivery.

### 3 REPORT

- 3.1 The aim of the strategy is to provide an effective means of successfully communicating the objectives of the LRMP via consistent messaging, focusing on media relations, community relations and internal communications. This will be achieved by establishing a group of core messages, delivered to key audiences and by integrating parallel programmes of internal and external communication.
- 3.2 The strategy is guided by four key factors:
- The political environment within which NFRS is currently operating
  - The internal management of the NFRS and its partners
  - The nature of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMP)
  - The day-to-day work of the NFRS
- 3.3 As well as these topical issues, Members will recognise that any communications plan for the successful development of the LRMP should reflect the primary purpose of NFRS, namely – the reduction of the incidence of death, injury and damage to property from fire, and other emergencies, and to ensure continued improvement in public safety.
- 3.4 The Service has always valued communicating with the public and its staff, but the issues it is communicating and the intensity of its communications work has changed since the industrial action in 2002.
- 3.5 Although implementing the Local Risk Management Plan will be central to the Authority's communications work, it needs to be set in the context of its wider communications, which encompasses operational issues, major incidents, community safety, CFA business and station events, recruitment etc.
- 3.6 All of these inter-linked issues will need to be encompassed in our communications planning. The Fire Authority's strategy to communicate LRMP should not sit in isolation.
- 3.7 Given the level of disruption in Nottinghamshire during the recent pay dispute, it is vital that any communications programme is not simply seen as a "PR exercise", but is seen of genuine value to the primary purpose of the NFRS. Engaging the workforce, as part of the process will ensure organisational clarity of purpose, and will assist in facilitating the management of change.
- 3.8 The ODPM has moved fast to fill the void in the strategic direction of the fire service following the pay dispute. However, the White Paper, the draft framework and the Fire and Rescue Services Bill, will result in the need for continuing clarity during the developing process of modernisation and change within the service. NFRS will aim to establish a positive internal and external reputation, generated by this proactive communications programme, which will help reduce the overall impact of any adverse reaction to the ongoing change process.

3.9 The Communication Strategy will incorporate existing tactical communications activity by developing an integrated strategy to generate public awareness, understanding and support for the LRMP, in order to:

- Increase opportunities for communication with the general public, to generate crucial understanding of the LRMP during implementation phase.
- Raise and support morale of Nottinghamshire uniformed and support staff.
- Enhance the Service's reputation in the local community at all levels.
- Promote and explain the objectives of LRMP during the implementation programme of the first year plan and during development of year two.
- Promote and explain the positive outcomes from the introduction of LRMP to all staff of Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue Service.

3.10 It has been assessed that the most effective way to deliver this strategy is to develop a group of core messages and target them to identified key audiences, both internally and externally, in parallel programmes. The second phase of the strategy would be to develop a detailed list of audiences, and these audiences can then be prioritised and scheduled into the ongoing communications programme.

3.11 The following core messages will form the core of the communication process:

- Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service is modernising its role to enhance the safety of the community
- That it will play a leading role along with other partners to bring about a safer environment for the community and business
- The range of services provided by the Fire Authority will be extended from the traditional firefighting role to a variety of rescue and protection roles.
- The Service will be transformed to a proactive one where working with the community becomes the primary objective.
- Fire cover will be primarily based on potential risk to life while continuing to provide protection for property.
- The Service will identify those most at risk so that our resources can be targeted more effectively.
- All of this work is aimed at bringing the service closer to the community and ultimately increasing the level of protection delivered.

Media statements will be produced to underpin the core messages, which will coincide with the launch of the LRMP and will continue throughout the process of embedding the plan during the coming years.

- 3.12 The critical audiences for the communications strategy are:
- The general public
  - Opinion formers
  - Regional political audiences
  - Internal staff
  - Media
- 3.13 Internal staff will be identified as a separate audience with a high level of prioritisation. Morale within the Service will be affected by the rate of change within the modernisation agenda. The strategy will be utilised to address concerns about the change programme and to embed a confident understanding of the process and programme of implementation. The representative bodies of NFRS are seen as a key supporting mechanism to aid the internal communications process, and all effort will be applied to facilitate their involvement.
- 3.14 The Communications Strategy will complement the management of change by providing more information to target audiences to help them understand why change is happening. Change for changes sake is not acceptable, particularly with public money, or for services where public lives could be put at risk. Therefore, it is important that the Authority does all it can to help its audiences understand why the LRMP is being implemented. This Communications Strategy argues that the LRMP will be good for the communities in Nottinghamshire. For this to be effective audiences need to understand why the LRMP is needed, as their current understanding is probably "If its not broken, why fix it?" Proactive communications will help the Service's critical audiences to understand how the LRMP is an enhancement / logical next step in the development of a modern fire and rescue emergency service.
- 3.15 The successful delivery of the Communications Strategy will be actioned via the attached implementation plan. Within the plan the following systematic approach is adopted:
- Agreed core messages and appropriate statements to reflect these messages
  - Identified audiences
  - Development of appropriate support materials
  - Implementation of appropriate contact schedule
  - Evaluated progress and adjustment process as required.

#### **4. NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1 Establish a communications task group which incorporates representation from, NFRS, Authority Members, and the Fire Service Corporate Communications Advisor.

- 4.2 Agree key audiences and establish the use of consistent core messages and integrate with local specific issues.
- 4.3 Task group to co-ordinate and identify who will lead with each audience and the contact method to be adopted.
- 4.4 Establish an LRMP media relations plan that will focus on the delivery of LRMP and will align with key points of implementation throughout the coming year. The plan will incorporate a proactive media schedule by theme, sequenced with the LRMP implementation programme.
- 4.5 Generate internal communications plan and implement to underpin action already taken during the formal LRMP consultation period. It is felt that the focus of the internal communications plan will be on 'talk tour briefings', supported by 'e' updates and organisation wide briefing sheets.
- 4.6 Integrate the internal communications plan with the already established representative bodies LRMP consultation process. The aim of this approach will be to generate the opportunity for collective mutually supportive and clarified communication flow.

## **5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The financial implications are presently being evaluated in consultation with the County Council's Corporate Communications Team.
- 5.2 The evaluation will encompass any additional financial implications contained within this report.

## **6 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no personnel implications arising from this report.

## **7 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 There are no equal opportunities implications arising from this report.

## **8 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report. However, a lack of communication process concerning IRMP implementation will negatively impact on the confidence of key internal and external stakeholders.

## **9 RECOMMENDATION**

- 9.1 That Members support the Strategy as set out above and as contained within the attached implementation plan.

**10 BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION**

None

P. Woods  
**CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**