



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority
Policy and Strategy Committee

CONSULTATION WORKING GROUP

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Agenda Item No:

Date: 02 November 2012

Purpose of Report:

To propose a Member led task and finish group to establish a 'Consultation Framework' for the forthcoming IRMP process and future Fire Authority consultations.

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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.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 During 2010 the Service undertook its most comprehensive consultation ever with regard to the production of its Fire Cover Review. During that process the Service undertook the following:
 - Consultation on the original IRMP that contained FCR as a work stream;
 - The FCR 2010 documents are all loaded as PDF documents on the website and we have also provided presentations and briefing packs to Members, managers and the press;
 - It has been included in the Members’ seminars over the last 2 years and on agendas at most CFA committee meetings;
 - Reports that have included FCR, either on our website or the City website under the current governance arrangements;
 - Media interviews that took place before the formal consultation exercise that meant the subject was in a public arena by the Chair of the Fire Authority, CFO and other Service officers;
 - The creation of representative body websites that may not be in our plans but do still ask people to complete the consultation document;
 - The formal CFA meetings that are an open public forum to attend;

- The formal media briefings that we held at SHQ and SDC at the launch of the formal phase;
- The media / newspaper coverage that we have had and the Media Communications Team have been recording;
- We have distributed approximately 3000 hard copies of the consultation document and have kept it available on the website;
- The document was available to be completed online or by post in its current format or alternative formats could have been requested;
- Copies have gone to the City and County councillors, borough/district circulation lists, which NFRS also checked to ensure we did not miss any;
- Employed an experienced market research company to assist in the whole process;
- Edwinstowe/Ollerton – combined forum and public focus group;
- Worksop – business breakfast / combined forum / public focus group;
- Retford - business breakfast / combined forum / public focus group;
- Mansfield - business breakfast / combined forum / public focus group;
- Greater Nottingham - business breakfast / combined forum;
- West Bridgford – 2 public focus groups;
- 2 RDS employee forum – one during the day and one at night time;
- 2 WDS employee forum;
- Support staff forum;
- Representative body consultation meetings attended by the DCFO since April 2010;
- Parish council seminar / forums – incl. Bassetlaw x2, Gedling and Broxtowe combined, Newark and Sherwood, Rushcliffe, Mansfield and Ashfield. NFRS officers also followed up letter invites by e-mail or telephone to ensure the best possible attendance was achieved;
- Contacting Chambers of Commerce and business club to engage with the business sector eg. Display at the Rushcliffe business forum event.

- NFRS completed drop-in sessions at town halls / libraries etc. to hand out the document – targeting those areas where they consider to be losing resources eg: Mansfield, Retford;
- Responding to letters via the Chair and CFO – eg: from local MPs;
- FOI requests that we have dealt with and are ongoing in relation to the provision of information around FCR, this has been greatly benefited by the early publication of all related data on to the Service website;
- Chief and Chair visits across the whole Service at stations in recent months to communicate with service employees around the FCR 2010 project and the future of the Service in the current economic climate;
- FCR 2010 has been placed on the agenda and discussed at LSPs / CDRPs via the Services Group Managers;
- We have commissioned and ran radio adds with key messages to highlight the need for the general public to get involved via the Communications and Media Team;
- NFRS also took out newspaper ads to raise the profile of the consultation process;
- Liaised with ORS over the costs we have incurred to date and seeking any areas of weakness that saw amendments taken into consultation extension.

2.2 Despite such a comprehensive approach, and the engagement of professional support, the responses from the community were considered to be low by the Fire Authority.

2.3 Therefore to ensure confidence from the Elected Members on the Fire Authority it is proposed that a small working group establish their key priorities for consultation in a Framework that the Service can employ. Although not an exhaustive list, this might include:

- The use of social media;
- The use of professional support;
- Media/newspaper coverage;
- Questionnaires;
- Briefings;
- Focus groups;
- Radio adverts.

2.4 The minimum timeframe for consultation is laid down in government guidelines as 12 weeks, but the Fire Authority may wish to set their own parameters. The Fire Cover Review process was extended to encourage a greater response and ultimately ran for approximately 16 weeks.

- 2.5 It is proposed that the group is supported by Officers and some external expertise to offer advice on the Service's previous consultation and its effectiveness.
- 2.6 The experience gained from the Fire Cover Review process has served the organisation well. Nottingham Trent University has cited the process as "best practice" and the final report from Opinion Research Services considered the process undertaken as robust.
- 2.7 Due to timeframes, the in-house team involved with the forthcoming IRMP process has started a 'light touch' consultation process. This is simply to establish the public's understanding of the IRMP process, what it means, how it affects them etc., rather than the specifics of the plan.
- 2.8 Formal consultation will need to commence in early spring 2013 if a new plan is to be ready by January 2014. Therefore it is important that the consultation framework required by the Fire Authority is agreed and in place at the earliest opportunity.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no direct cost implications for the establishment of the working group and the production of a planning framework. Indirect costs, predominantly relating to Officer support, will be absorbed into the pay budgets. External advice will have a cost which will be contained from within the current consultation budget.
- 3.2 There are potential costs arising from the outcomes of the group which will need to be addressed as part of the budget planning process. For the Fire Cover Review the Authority spent circa £50k in addition to the funds normally assigned to consultation. Depending on the nature and level of consultation employed, this budget may need to be addressed.

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 specific crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The duty to consult the public is contained within 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 Policy and Strategy Committee establish a Member led task and finish group to establish a consultation framework.

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

None.

Frank Swann
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER