



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

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

UPDATE ON THE SERVICE'S CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 02 July 2021

Purpose of Report:

To update Members with amendments to the Service's Consultation Framework ahead of the Service's engagement relating to the new Strategic Plan.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Members:

- Endorse the Service's approach to consultation.
- Approve the updated Consultation Framework.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Fire and Rescue National Framework for England (National Framework document) states that fire and rescue services must be transparent and accountable to their communities for their decisions and actions and plan their local services through effective consultation and involvement.
- 1.2 Where fire and rescue services are considering making material changes to service provision - relating to prevention, protection or response - then there is a requirement to undertake public consultation on the options available.
- 1.3 The National Framework document also requires Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) to be easily accessible to the public and reflect effective consultation with the community, staff representative bodies and partners throughout their development (and at all review stages). Additionally, Services must set out the principles and approach it will take on consultation activity.
- 1.4 Fire and rescue services are required to '*conscientiously consider*' the responses received from public consultation before deciding on any changes that may be made.
- 1.5 Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service's (NFRS) Consultation Framework was published in January 2013 and was aligned to the Government's Code of Practice on Consultation (2008).
- 1.6 In 2018, the Government produced an updated set of Consultation Principles which gave public services clearer direction in relation to the proportionality and scrutiny of consultations. There was also a greater emphasis on considering the needs of those groups being consulted.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 As part of the Service's Year Three Strategic Priority of 'Shaping our Future', a review of the Consultation Framework (2013) was undertaken. This will inform the Service's approach to forming the new 'Strategic Plan'.
- 2.2 The review highlighted that the Service's Consultation Framework did not fully reflect the most recent Governmental recommendations in relation to public service consultations (Consultation Principles 2018). Greater emphasis needed to be added regarding the proportionality of consultations being undertaken, the facilitation of scrutiny of the feedback received through the consultation process and the requirements of the groups being consulted.
- 2.3 The minor amendments made to the NFRS Consultation Framework ensure that the updated document reflects the most recent governmental guidance and can be considered compliant against the National Framework document and the Government's Consultation Principles, 2018.

- 2.4 The increased emphasis within the Consultation Framework on the proportionality of consultations will allow the Service, should it wish, to adopt a more efficient approach to consultation. This would see shorter, more focussed consultation processes for certain activities with full (12-week) consultation maintained for significant changes that affected the delivery of services to communities.
- 2.5 The greater prominence given to the facilitation of scrutiny of the findings of any consultations will allow NFRS to demonstrate that it operates as a transparent and publicly accountable body through its consultation processes.
- 2.6 The revised Consultation Framework (attached as an appendix to this report) will guide the consultation in relation to forming the Service's new Strategic Plan.
- 2.7 Consultation on the Service's new Strategic Plan will incorporate: 'pre-consultation' with staff, stakeholders and partners; engagement with the Nottinghamshire Citizen Panel; full consultation facilitated by an external, independent consultation company; and any necessary adaptations to address current restrictions in place due to Covid-19.
- 2.8 Consultation on the 'Strategic Plan' will begin after presentation of the draft Strategic Plan to the Combined Fire Authority in September 2021.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

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

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An equality impact assessment has been undertaken during the review of the Consultation Framework.
- 5.2 The greater emphasis on considering the needs of those groups being consulted, within the amended Consultation Framework, will embed a policy driven approach to community focussed consultation; considering and meeting the needs of our diverse community to best engage with them.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

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

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Statutory requirements around consultation processes have been reviewed and have led to a revision in the Service's Consultation Framework. This framework is now aligned to the latest national guidance and best practice.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The review of the Service's Consultation Framework, and revised document, address the Corporate Risk of 'Workforce Engagement' through ensuring that NFRS personnel are effectively engaged in consultation on Service proposals.
- 8.2 The revised Consultation Framework ensures that the Authority meet the statutory requirements and best-practice guidelines for consultation.

9. COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS

There are no collaboration implications arising from this report.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 10.1 Endorse the Service's approach to consultation.
- 10.2 Approve the updated Consultation Framework.

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

None.

John Buckley
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Consultation Framework

2021



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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 about the provision of fire and rescue services throughout our City and County. There are requirements within the National Framework to consult effectively on our plans during 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 we serve.

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

Consultation Criteria

Our consultation criteria reflect the Government's Consultation Principles (2018).

These criteria allow 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.](#)



When to Consult

1.1 Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority will consult when its decisions about the Fire and Rescue Service are likely to have a direct impact on the public.

1.2 Formal consultation is an important stage in any policy making process and will be conducted by one, or a range of methods, to open decisions to scrutiny and allow for 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 additional 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 in different ways. 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). If we do have to do this, we will take account of the impact and adjust our processes accordingly.



The duration of our consultation

2.1 Under normal circumstances consultations will last for up to 12 weeks. The duration of consultations will vary depending on the nature and impact of the issues and may typically last between two and twelve weeks. A proportionate consultation period will be factored into our planning processes to allow for the widest possible relevant engagement. It will also allow us to digest and respond before deciding on any final plans.



2.2 If a consultation must 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 be proportionate and reflect the issues and timetable available, we may choose to use one or a range of different approaches, including websites, media, social media and other quantitative or qualitative options. Because we want the best data to inform the Fire Authority's decisions, 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.

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 ensure that consultees can give informed responses to support our consultation processes. An equality impact assessment will be undertaken on 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 direct way with that 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.



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 who the consultation is intended to reach.

4.2 We will ensure that our consultations use an appropriate range of methods and are designed and targeted accordingly. Where consultation exercises are needed 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 distributing 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 of how we may consult is contained in Appendix A of this framework.



The cost of our 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 website.



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 We will seek to publish responses on the same page as our website along with an explanation on how the responses have informed Service priorities.

6.4 The outcomes of all consultation involving the public will be formally presented to the full Fire Authority at one of its meetings where decisions on the consultation will be made.

6.5 Consultation detail will also be précised and published in line with our consultation document within -twelve weeks of the consultation period closing.



Our capacity to consult

7.1 Where possible, we will always try to conduct consultations ourselves, as a Service, to keep costs down.

7.2 Where 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 Where we need 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
- Online survey





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