



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

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

CONSULTATION FRAMEWORK

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Date: 29 April 2016

Purpose of Report:

To present the outcomes of the consultation framework review.

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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 the reviewed consultation framework with which Officers can operate to ensure all expectations are met.
- 1.4 In 2013 a member and officer 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.
- 1.5 As an outcome, a consultation framework was produced entitled the Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire and Rescue Authority Consultation Framework. This document was accepted by Fire Authority on 22 February 2013 and can be found at:
http://www.notts-fire.gov.uk/Documents/Consultation_Framework.pdf

2. REPORT

- 2.1 Community consultation exercises are often very emotive and members will recall the number of petitions that the Authority has received in recent years, for example, in response to proposed changes to the operational fleet available within the county.
- 2.2 Members will also be fully aware of the research and evidence that is made available to the Authority, workforce and the general public on which any proposals are based and on which members may need to make decisions. These previous experiences have ensured that a clear framework is maintained and seeks to encourage community engagement with Nottinghamshire Fire and Rescue Service (NFRS).
- 2.3 A consistent observation from previous consultations has been the number of respondents to proposals in comparison to the total population and that this is less than ideal, but generally reflective of consultation activity beyond the fire and rescue sector.

- 2.4 Consultation seeks to balance both the qualitative as well as quantitative value of responses, however, future exercises will aim to attract as many views as it can and assure members that the framework satisfies the duties of the Authority.
- 2.5 A review of the 2013 consultation framework has now been conducted by officers, the content of the framework is considered to still be fit for purpose. The approach and methods of consultation are still deemed to be relevant and given that previous consultation processes have been held up as best practice by Nottingham Trent University, this report does not propose to make changes to the framework at this stage.
- 2.6 The framework continues to be based upon the good practice principles of consultation previously set by Government. These ensure that any process conducted will stand up to external scrutiny and have recently been supported by a Government update to guidance to public bodies who are required to formally consult, including:
- Consultations should be clear and concise;
 - Consultations should have a purpose;
 - Consultations should be informative;
 - Consultations are only part of a process of engagement;
 - Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time;
 - Consultations should be targeted;
 - Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted;
 - Consultations should be agreed before publication;
 - Consultation should facilitate scrutiny;
 - Government responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion;
 - Consultation exercises should not generally be launched during local or national election periods.
- 2.7 Previously NFRS have used Opinion Research Services (ORS) to assist in consultation exercises as they held a central contract for consultation with the Fire and Rescue Service Consultation Association (FSCA). Since the FSCA no longer exists there will be a need to re-tender for consultation providers.
- 2.8 The tender process is already underway and will aim to support the framework as a clear goal and assure the Authority that the measures in place are open, transparent and robust.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The Fire Authority has an annual budget set aside for consultation and depending on the nature and extent of any in-year consultation, this is regularly reviewed.

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

This report is an update to an existing Authority approach to consultation already in place and therefore does not require any additional assessment, however, the Authority will need to demonstrate that it has engaged with all sections of the community affected by any future, specific proposals and therefore would require an equality impact assessment to be completed at that stage.

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 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.
- Maintains full transparency to communities and the high level of public confidence in the Fire and Rescue Service.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

That Members note the outcomes of the review of the consultation framework and continue to support its use.

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

None.

John Buckley
CHIEF FIRE OFFICER