

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service

Consultation Strategy 2007 - 2009

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Introduction

This Consultation Strategy has been developed in order for Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service to satisfy its statutory obligations, ensure the requirements set out within the Annual Plan/Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) are met and that the Service is prepared for the implementation of the Government's Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) in 2009.

Purpose

The Consultation Strategy will determine the views and opinions of stakeholders in all areas within which the Service operates in order to determine levels of service provided, areas of risk and financial efficiency.

The consultation outlined in the Action Plan is to remove the need for the Service to make assumptions and decisions in order to implement new measures towards improvement in these areas.

Drawing the widest possible range of data and views available will enable the Service to make informed decisions, provide the best possible response and fulfill the needs of the communities which it serves.

Scope

This strategy applies to all departments of Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service for internal and external consultation.

See Appendix B for the Strategic Overview of consultation.

Risks

The development of the Service's Strategic Risk Register highlighted the importance of consultation and engagement of staff, members and stakeholders and is fundamental to the IRMP process.

Failure to carry out consultation would result in the Service failing to fulfill its legal requirement. It is essential that the Service adopts a flexible and consistent Consultation Strategy in order to satisfy its obligations.

Statutory Requirements – Legal Obligations

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service must carry out as a statutory requirement the following consultation:

- Finance – Budget and Statement of Accounts (annually).
- The Business Plan/Annual Plan (includes Best Value and IRMP - annually).
- The level of satisfaction achieved by the way the Authority delivers its services (ongoing).

Corporate Aim

“To continue providing an efficient and effective Fire & Rescue Service, protecting the people in Wiltshire & Swindon, by working together with others to make our communities safer and stronger.”

Corporate Objectives and Outcomes

Objective 4 – Finance and Performance

Priority 4B - Implement a communications and consultation framework which engages with staff, people, partners and stakeholders enabling them to influence the future direction of the organisation. To promote good news of our achievements and to respond to the needs and expectations of the people of Wiltshire & Swindon.

Priority Outcome - That the changing needs and expectations of the people of Wiltshire & Swindon influence the strategic and operational priorities and that effective communication contributes to building a safer and stronger community.

This Strategy also takes into consideration the Communications Action Plan and both will be carefully co-ordinated where necessary.

Consultation Objectives

To ensure that consultation (internal and external) is carried out in the most effective and efficient way, Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service will:

- Ensure that consultation is clear, concise, widely accessible and reaches minority, hard-to-reach and at risk groups using ‘plain English’ and is also available in ethnic minority languages and large print.
- Identify alternative media to reach people who have literacy problems.
- Ensure that the consultative process is anti-discriminatory and does not exclude any individual on the grounds of age, race, disability or gender.

- Set out clear proposals, highlighting who may be affected, the questions being asked and the timescale for responses.
- Choose venues for consultative meetings that are physically accessible and are a welcoming and non-threatening environment.
- Give feedback regarding the responses received and how the consultation process influenced decision-making.
- Monitor the effectiveness of consultation.
- Identify and learn from best practice as identified within Central Government or other local authorities.
- Target those communities which are most at risk or have been under-represented in the past.

As part of the consultation process, Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service will ensure:

- People are involved in the consultation process as early as possible.
- The nature of consultation exercises is clarified.
- A strategy is produced and tailored to every consultation exercise and will include a detailed list of who is to be consulted and the intentions of how those groups are to be reached.
- Consultation exercises are project planned e.g. managed, timetabled, have clear aims and are clearly communicated to the people involved.
- Results of consultation exercises are published and fed back into the planning and decision-making process in an open and responsible way. This will include demonstrating how the outcomes of consultation have been used to improve services.
- Views on how to improve consultation with all parts of the community, especially those considered as 'hard to reach', 'at risk' and under represented are proactively sought.
- Consultation activities are in collaboration with partnerships and or other authorities where appropriate.
- To continue to develop and seek new initiatives and techniques for continuous improvement in the way consultation is carried out.
- Consultations will adhere to best practice, data quality and confidentiality principles.
- Consultation is used proactively to direct priorities, rather than to respond to them.
- All activities and campaigns will be evaluated, and consultation responses will be fed into their future design and delivery.
- All consultations will be impact assessed.

All consultation exercises will also follow the 'SMART' methodology of:

Specific
Measurable
Agreed
Realistic
Timebound

Benefits of Consulting

Consultation is a two-way process and is the best way of communicating thoughts and ideas. Using consultation will:

- Encourage staff and stakeholders to become more involved in the decision-making process.
- Assist decision-making about policies, priorities and strategies.
- Target services to become what people want, avoiding what they do not want – cost efficient.
- Increase responsiveness to need.
- Identify potential problems early so changes can be made to services.
- Strengthen the Service's role in the community.
- Improve the Service's image.
- Improve community understanding of the services provided by Wiltshire FRS.
- Generate new ideas.
- Enable the testing out of proposed ideas before implementing them.
- Ensure planning, providing and monitoring quality of performance.
- Promote sustainability in improving existing services and introducing new ones.
- Help the community to contribute to meeting their own needs.

Consultation Topics

Consultation can be used to discover opinion on a wide variety of subjects. This can include:

- Perceptions of the Service.
- Satisfaction levels.
- Areas of disengagement.
- Thoughts on direction or priorities.
- Direct experience of campaigns.
- Awareness of the Service and its role.

Member Involvement

The role of the Combined Fire Authority Members is crucial to the consultation process in terms of their formal involvement in:

- Local community initiatives.
- Community planning.
- The Best Value processes.
- The development of performance plans.

Members will play a key role in this strategy through:

- Instigating consultation initiatives.
- Feedback from involvement in local groups, partnerships and forums.
- Relationships with residents.
- Feedback from Councillor Committees.

Audience

Below are some of the main categories of stakeholder that will be targeted for consultation:

- Wiltshire FRS staff.
- Council tax payers.
- Service users.
- Private sector organisations.
- Public sector organisations.
- Voluntary sector organisation.
- Community partners.
- Other partnerships.
- Schools.
- Faith/cultural groups.
- Councils.
- Representative bodies.

Hard to Reach Groups:

- Young people.
- People with disabilities.
- People who are elderly.
- Black and minority ethnic groups.
- People with caring responsibilities.
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community.
- Socially-excluded groups.
- Religion/belief.
- Travellers.
- Recent immigrants.
- Those in receipt of benefits.

Under-represented Groups

Particular initiatives will be pursued to ensure the involvement of people who may be under-represented in consultation exercises, such as:

- Young people
- People with disabilities
- People from ethnic minority groups
- People who are elderly

Young People

Consultation will take place through a variety of networks including:

- Schools and colleges.
- Youth and community centres.
- Local Authority Youth Forums.
- Community and voluntary organisations.
- Web-based sites.

People with Disabilities

To facilitate effective consultation with people with disabilities we will, wherever possible:

- Ensure that all venues for consultation meetings are fully accessible.
- Ensure that transport is provided where necessary.
- Ensure that all forms of communication meet the needs of the visually impaired.
- Liaise with voluntary and community groups whose members have disabilities.
- Encourage the active participation of carers and advocates.
- Provide appropriate facilities for all meetings (i.e. induction loops, sign language facilities etc).

Minority Ethnic Groups

Every effort will be made to consult directly with residents (using appropriate translation and interpretation services). Written information will be made available in appropriate languages. Liaison will take place through mosques, temples, relevant voluntary and community organisations and community leaders including the relevant 'Council of Faiths'. Particular initiatives will be identified to involve gypsies and travelling people.

People who are Elderly

Consultation will take place through a variety of organisations, both statutory and non-statutory, which offer services, advice and assistance to them. Special initiatives will be identified to contact the frail elderly who may be largely housebound or in residential accommodation.

Partnerships

Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service works closely with other service providers to deliver joint objectives and priorities. Some of the partnerships that the Service is involved in include:

- Local Strategic Partnership.
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.
- Safer Wiltshire Executive.
- Wiltshire Strategic Board.

Through our consultation work we will seek to:

- Involve partners in determining and setting our priorities.
- Consult the communities and stakeholders on the work done by our partners.
- Consult on our partners' direction and priorities.
- Find out whether our partners are meeting their objectives and targets.

Methods of Consultation

The Service will employ both quantitative and qualitative research methods in order to understand fully the opinions and requirements of the communities it serves.

To ensure the consultation objectives are reached and the Action Plan (see Appendix A) can be achieved and embedded, various means of consultation will need to be carried out both internally and externally. Following best practice, the list below highlights methods that have proved successful within the Service and with other agencies:

- Station open days.
- Employee surveys.
- Community surveys.
- Parish council surveys.
- Public/popular surveys.
- Public focus groups/meetings.
- Employee focus groups.
- Stakeholder forums.
- Representative bodies focus groups.
- Commercial business breakfasts.

- Comments and complaints.
- Targeted surveys.
- Targeted focus groups/meetings.

The Service will maintain up-to-date area profiles to ensure that it targets the appropriate groups in the best ways. It will also develop community contacts in order to access different community groups in the best ways. In addition, the Communication Action Plan details ways the Service can target information at the appropriate groups.

Planning for the Future

This Strategy will help Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service prepare for future consultation requirements. These will include:

- Comprehensive Area Assessment.
- National Indicator Set.
- Place Survey.
- The FRS Equality and Diversity Strategy.
- The National Framework 2008-11.

Financial Implications/Resource

In order to carry out the Consultation Action Plan an initial budget will need to be set that can be reviewed and amended on an annual basis.

Timescales

This Consultation Strategy and Action Plan will be embedded into the Service's business planning process by the implementation of the Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA) in 2009.

Equality Impact Assessment

Public bodies are required to assess the impact of their policies and procedures on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. An Equality Impact Assessment is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy to determine whether or not that policy has a negative impact on groups or individuals in relation to one or more of the seven equality categories.

It has been determined that this strategy will have no likely negative impact on any of the groups as listed in the equality categories. Any impact will be regularly monitored and the strategy will be reviewed again in March 2009.

Appendix A - Consultation Action Plan 2008 - 2010

Corporate Priorities	Outcomes	Activity
1A – People Focused Organisation	<p>Staff have the opportunity to make suggestions and give feedback on issues relating to the organisation and that views are considered in the strategic decision making process.</p> <p>All staff feedback will be available in an open and reliable way.</p> <p>That consultation is incorporated into the Service's business planning process. All departments have consultation within their department plans.</p>	<p>Re-develop the staff suggestion scheme to be included in the Weekly Bulletin with a PO response.</p> <p>A rolling program of staff seminars is established.</p> <p>Frequently Asked Questions from staff seminars are published via the Weekly Bulletin and Intranet.</p> <p>Produce feedback forms for the Intranet.</p> <p>Reports of Findings and Recommendations following any consultation process.</p> <p>To ensure all reports are reviewed at the appropriate level and that responses to recommendations are evidenced.</p> <p>Produce actions plans following approval of recommendations to be incorporated into Department's workloads.</p> <p>Run Consultation Awareness (including legal requirements) Workshops to ensure consultation is fully understood across the Service including CFA Members.</p>
1B – Incident and Command Training	Ensure effective consultation is completed on ICS training.	Liaise with HR and Training over the consultation process on ICS training.

Continued...

Consultation Strategy 2008 – 2010

Corporate Priority	Outcomes	Activity
2A – Community Safety 2B – Road Traffic Safety 2C – Effective Partnership Working 2D – Operational Assurance 2E – Respond to the Changing Nature of Operational Threats 2F - Work in Partnership to Implement Co-responder Scheme 2G - Fire Safety Enforcement - Regulatory Reform Order 2H – Call Management & Incident Control 2I – Fire Investigation 3A - Effective Management of our Assets 3B – Business Continuity 3C – Embed a Procurement Strategy 3D – Information & Technology Systems 4A – Use of Resources 4D – Quality Assurance 4E – Fire Cover Review 4F - Reducing the Level of Risk Through Effective Management Information	<p>The community, partners and other stakeholders will be able to make suggestions and give feedback on issues relating to the organisation and that their views are considered and evidenced in the strategic decision making process.</p>	<p>To establish methods of consultation to be used to ensure all aspects of the community can be targeted effectively and efficiently.</p> <p>Work with Community Safety and Technical Fire Safety to produce satisfaction surveys to be used with any customer based or partnership work.</p> <p>To review and develop suitable feedback forms for the website e.g. documentation, comments and complaints.</p> <p>Ensure methods are in place for utilising existing links with partnerships for consultation purposes through appropriate Area Managers.</p> <p>Set procedures in place for After the Incident Surveys results to be turned around quicker and reports with recommendations are produced, evidenced, approved and action plans are implemented within agreed time-scales.</p> <p>All citizen surveys are itemised on the Business Management Team agenda for questions to be set to reflect business priorities.</p> <p>Build relationships with Parish Councils to facilitate effective local consultation e.g. Focus Groups.</p>
4B – Communications Strategy	<p>Communications and Consultation work together to make Wiltshire FRS a reliable, open and trustworthy organisation.</p>	<p>Design, develop and implement the Consultation Strategy working closely with the Communications Department.</p>
4C – Managing Performance	<p>Consultation is an integral part of performance management.</p>	<p>All of the above.</p>

Appendix B – Strategic Overview

