

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 21 SEPTEMBER 2016
REPORT OF: HEAD OF COMMUNICATION (INTERIM)
AUTHOR: SIAN CORRIGAN

SUBJECT: UPDATED CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND
CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT
STRATEGIES

Purpose of Report

1. This report highlights the key changes to both the Corporate Communications Strategy and the Consultation and Engagement Strategy and seeks approval to publish the updated documents.

Recommended: That

- [1] The Corporate Communications Strategy and Consultation and Engagement Strategy are approved.

Background

2. The Service's commitment to accessible communication and community engagement is set out in one of its key corporate objectives: "Inform and involve our communities and our staff in developing services and policies which are open, transparent and accountable."
3. The Authority must remain committed to evolving how it communicates messages to ensure that we continue to adapt to the way in which our public and stakeholders expect to be communicated with.
4. The Corporate Communication Strategy (Appendix 1) sets out how the Service intends to rise to the challenges set by the current communication landscape over the next two years. It will focus on the principles that the organisation will adopt to achieve meaningful two-way conversations with its internal and external audiences.
5. The Consultation and Engagement Strategy (Appendix 2), which sits behind the Corporate Communication Strategy, provides a more in-depth look at how the Service will ensure it effectively engages and consults with the public and stakeholders.

6. The two strategies have been updated at the same time to ensure consistency and clarity in advance of the Service's upcoming consultation about its next Integrated Risk Management Plan and Public Satisfaction Survey.
7. The change of responsibility from the Department for Communities and Local Government to the Home Office in early 2016, along with the forthcoming fire reform programme, will place increasing emphasis on providing an accountable and transparent service to the community. The two strategies have been updated to reflect these changes and to provide principles and guidelines which will allow the Service to respond appropriately and in line with best practice.

Key changes

8. This section looks at each of the updated strategies in turn and briefly summarises the key changes and the specific points to note.

Corporate Communications Strategy

9. Huge technological and digital advancements continue to affect the way people and organisations communicate with each other. We are in an age where the demand for immediate interaction between service providers and their publics and stakeholders, including staff, has never been higher.
10. The new updated Strategy has some clear SMART Objectives that will enable more effective evaluation.
11. The Strategy lists details of the key communication mechanisms that the Service will use to communicate and the insight work that has determined why these channels have been chosen.
12. People's viewing habits have evolved – more people now use multiple platforms (such as TV plus an iPad) to view different things at the same time.
13. Smartphone ownership is at an all time high (66% of UK adults) and more people are now turning to their phone to access the internet rather than use a computer or laptop.
14. The fragmented nature of communications now requires a more integrated approach to communication using multiple channels.

15. Social media continues to grow. However, in Cheshire more traditional forms of communication (print press and face to face) continue to be important tools.
16. Video is a huge area of growth and something the Service needs to harness.
17. Case studies need to play an integral part of safety campaigns.

Consultation and Engagement Strategy

18. The devolution of power to local communities has been a central policy of both the current and previous administrations as a means of ensuring greater local control of services with a view to driving efficiency. This has also meant that there is an increasing expectation on local authorities and bodies to engage and consult with service users and local stakeholders to shape the delivery of services in a transparent and accountable manner, according to local needs.
19. The updated Strategy clarifies these expectations on the Service, specifically those set out in the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework around the accessibility and development of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs).
20. To ensure the Service's future consultation and engagement continues to be robust, the strategy includes revised guidance aligned to the Cabinet Office Consultation Principles and highlights the expanding role of online technologies, such as social media, in facilitating consultation and engagement. It also commits to working with other organisations where necessary to provide assurance and maintenance of competence.

Finance

21. Existing communication and consultation budgets will be sufficient to meet initial proposals in the strategies. Any future proposals which require additional resources would be subject to the Service's existing business case processes.

Legal

22. Complying with the strategies will help the Service meet its requirement to communicate as set out in the Civil Contingencies Act. It will also help meet the increased demand for transparency and accountability as well as protecting the Service from a potential Judicial Review.

Equality Impact Assessment

23. The strategies have previously been subject to initial and subsequently full equality impact assessments (EIAs) as they identified the potential for both communications and consultation to have a differential impact on a number of the protected characteristics, particularly around disability and access to information.
24. The adoption of accessibility standards for the website, updates to sections of the corporate identity manual and changes to consultation protocols and procedures addressed the majority of the issues previously identified, however, adoption of the new Strategies will be supported by a new full EIA.

Environmental

25. Increasing use of online channels for both communications and consultation offers opportunities to reduce the Service's use of paper and options to expand the use of information packaged in different ways. Any changes in this area will, however, have to be balanced against the potential to discriminate against those who have problems in accessing services and information online.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

Appendix 1 – Draft Corporate Communications Strategy 2016-18

Appendix 2 – Draft Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2016-18