



Corporate Communications Strategy

2016-18

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Appendix One:
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1. Introduction.

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. This coupled with the fact that we remain in a period of austerity means that in order to communicate effectively it is more important than ever that we adopt a flexible and creative approach to crafting our messages.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service 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.

This Corporate Communications Strategy 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.

In addition to a study of national best practices the development of this strategy has also been informed by the findings of the following studies:

- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's Staff Satisfaction Survey
- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's Public Satisfaction Surveys
- The Government Communication Service '7 trends in leading-edge communications'.

It is also supported by two further strategies. These are the Digital Engagement Strategy and the Consultation and Engagement Strategy.

Any comments or queries about the strategy should be addressed to: Corporate Communications, Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Sadler Road, Winsford CW7 2FQ. Tel: 01606 868657. Alternatively email corporatecommunications@cheshirefire.gov.uk

2. Context.

Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service first developed a Communication Strategy back in 2005. This was subsequently updated in 2008 and 2012. This updated strategy is being written at a time of significant change for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service and indeed the whole sector.

2.1 Political changes.

In 2015 fire and rescue services in England and Wales transferred from the control of the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) to that of the Home Office. This has brought with it calls for the sector to be more accountable and transparent about its work and performance. This is likely to have significant impact on the need for our Service to communicate openly with its stakeholders.

2.2 Internal factors.

A period of industrial action taken by members of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) between 2011 and 2015 has also taken its toll on internal relations. The latest Staff Satisfaction Survey reported a drop in staff's overall satisfaction levels with working for the Service. This was especially evident among operational staff.

The Service is also currently embarking on a collaboration programme that will see all the back office staff transferred to Cheshire Constabulary. This move will mark a significant period of change both for staff and the organisation.

The above internal issues mean that this communication strategy will seek to develop internal communications further than previous strategies to ensure that the organisation once again achieves a more engaged and cohesive workforce.

2.3 The communication landscape.

Thanks to the digital and technological revolution of the past decade the media channels people use to access information has never been more fragmented. According to Ofcom's 2015 Communications Market Report 66% of UK adults now own a smartphone. This is up from 39% back in 2012. Interestingly the same report highlights that more people are now turning to their phone to access the internet rather than use a computer or laptop. This will be something this strategy will seek to harness and use to ensure effective reach of our messages.

Traditional media, while significantly reduced, has not disappeared and still plays an important role in both the Service's day to day communication and reputation management.

The fragmented nature of current media channels calls for an integrated communication response from us that harnesses different mediums to drive home single messages. This will provide the focus for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's communication strategy over the next three years. Details of some of the mechanisms we will adopt to deliver this will be detailed later in the strategy.

3. Vision, aims and objectives.

3.1 Vision.

This communication strategy will seek to support the Service's vision of:

"A Cheshire where there are no deaths from fires or other emergencies."

3.2 Aims.

This strategy will aim to:

- To ensure mechanisms are put in place to create meaningful, two-way dialogue between the organisation and its stakeholders.
- To ensure that Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service communicates in an open and transparent way with its stakeholders.
- To protect and enhance the reputation of Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- To ensure that the Service communicates safety messages with the public.
- To ensure that the Service's stakeholders are kept informed about the work of the Service.
- To enhance levels of staff engagement and satisfaction.
- To ensure that the Service communicates effectively during an emergency.

3.3 Communication objectives.

Objective One	To ensure that 65% of the public state that they value Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service as a service provider over the next three years.
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Objective Two	To ensure that the Service engages at least 100,000 people about safety campaigns over the coming three years.
Objective Three	To ensure that the organisation's staff engagement score achieves 76% by 2018.
Objective Four	To ensure that 60% of staff are satisfied with communication and provision of information in Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service by 2018.
Objective Five	To ensure that 70% of people know what to do in the event of a major emergency by 2018.
Objective Six	To ensure that 85% of key stakeholders are satisfied with communication from the Service.

4. Insight

The development of this strategy has required an in depth look into current and emerging trends in communication. This section will highlight a number of issues that have been considered when deciding on the mechanisms and approach the Service will adopt when communicating.

4.1 A fragmented communication landscape.

Gone are the days when whole families sat down together to watch one TV screen. We now all communicate on numerous platforms – sometimes at the same time. People are able to demand the ability to consume information when and where they want it. 99% of adults multi-task or dual screen, using two media at some point during an average week (Source: Ofcom Report 2014). This provides us with a challenge to ensure that our messages are suitable to be seen by a mobile audience but also an opportunity to reach people in more innovative ways.

It is also worth noting the fact that the Cheshire communication landscape is particularly fragmented. We are one of the only counties in the UK not to have a dedicated BBC radio station, instead we are covered in part by three stations. There is also no one commercial station that is dedicated to news across the whole of Cheshire, Halton and Warrington. We also have no print publication that covers the whole area. This does increase the resource needed both in terms of people time and potential advertising budget when the Service is attempting to drive a campaign across its entire service area.

4.2 The rise of the smartphone.

Two thirds of people now own a smartphone, using it for nearly two hours every day to browse the internet, access social media, bank and shop online (Source: Ofcom Report 2015). Ofcom's 2015 Communications Market Report also found that a third (33%) of internet users see their smartphone as the most important device for going online, compared to 30% who are still sticking with their laptop. The rise in

smartphone surfing marks a clear shift since 2014, when just 22% turned to their phone first, and 40% preferred their laptop (Source: Ofcom Report 2015). Ofcom has also reported in 2016 that the figure of people who only use their smartphone to access the internet has risen from 6% (2014) to 16% (2016).

This makes it essential that the Service ensures it adopts communication techniques and mechanisms that are able to be viewed on mobile platforms.

4.3 Shareable and 'snackable' content.

People like to share news and stories with each other. This has not changed. What has changed however, is the way in which these stories are exchanged. Thanks in no small part to the growth in social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube there is a growing trend of viral communication that allows people to share messages with a much wider audience than ever before. However, online conversations have not replaced face-to-face communication. A study by the US Superbowl (one of the biggest advertising events in the world) revealed that for every one online share there were at least two offline conversations.

The science behind creating communication that people want to share in such that it goes 'viral' has not yet been proved. As a Service we will ensure we aim to create shareable and 'snackable' content by making it interesting, simple, timely and creative with a great story behind it.

4.4 Video is king.

This is a huge growth area for communication. Once upon a time you may have visited a web page to read some text – now more often than not it is to view a video. A good video that attracts a viewer's attention can increase the reach of your message. A great example of where video helped power a campaign was the 'Ice Bucket Challenge' that raised more than £88million for charity.

4.5 Layered messaging.

The fragmented nature of the communication landscape also means that there is a growing need to ensure that messages are crafted across multiple channels. There is also evidence (Source: Ipsos MORI) that by layering a message across multiple channels over a period of time results in people having a higher recall of information. The important fact is that these messages are consistent throughout the campaign.

4.6 Traditional media.

The Service's previous Communication Strategy detailed the plight of what could be considered the traditional media – most notably newspapers.

Times continue to be difficult for the print business. However, local and national newspapers have invested heavily in their websites to adapt to the needs of their readership. The impact on the Service is that this is fuelling the need for the Service to rise to the challenge presented by 24 hours news. This is especially necessary when communicating during a major emergency.

The traditional media still has an important part to play in Cheshire. In 2014 the Service conducted a Public Satisfaction Survey. This revealed that in the event of a major emergency 41% would turn to their local newspaper for information compared with 33% who said they would use social media. It is also worth noting however, that other than family and friends most people (68%) would turn to their TV to stay updated.

The table in *Appendix One* shows examples of how these communication channels will be used to communicate with stakeholder groups.

5. Strategic options

Based on the insight gathered when developing this strategy the Service will use the methods and mechanisms set out in this section to communicate with both its internal and external stakeholders. As discussed previously the Service will strive to achieve effective communication by using multiple channels to enhance the impact of single messages, campaigns or consultation activity. Therefore, although the following methods are listed separately they will be used in an integrated way.

5.1 Media relations: Local and regional.

The media on a local and regional level remains an important factor in the delivery of both the Service's campaign delivery and reputation management. This includes both print and broadcast. Therefore, the Service will aim to use a proactive approach to build and maintain links with the press. We will also aim to respond to all press queries and questions to avoid a 'no comment'.

The Service's Corporate Communications team will take the lead in handling the media. Although operational staff will need to provide interviews as requested and there will be a need for station staff to deal with some media calls as these cannot be avoided. Training will be provided to help them with this.

5.2 Media relations: National press.

The Service will on occasions seek to engage the national media to raise the profile of a particular piece of work or campaign that is particularly unique or ground breaking.

It will also be important to work with the national media during major incidents.

5.3 Media relations: Trade Press.

There are a number of trade publications that relate specifically to the emergency services and several that are fire and rescue specific. The Service will aim to secure articles in such publications in order to raise its profile and reputation within the sector.

5.4 Video

Google recently announced that according to their data 82% of the internet is going to be video by 2017. This makes the medium of video a valuable campaign tool both for staff and the public. The Service will aim to create suitable video content for use on its social media channels and website.

5.5 Case studies.

Evidence suggests that a successful campaign must resonate emotionally with its target audience. It is also more likely to result in a change in people's behaviour. Therefore, over the next three years the Service will seek to highlight case studies to support both internal and external campaigns. This could involve either members of the public or staff dependant on the campaign.

5.6 Publications

The Service will produce a number of publications. In the main these will be produced in-house. However, the Service may also use the outside design agencies when demand is high or for particular products.

Publications produced will include:

- The Service's IRMP (Integrated Risk Management Plan)
- An Annual Report
- The Alert staff magazine.

There will also be the need for other publications. These will be produced as part of specific campaigns.

5.7 Advertising

The Service will on occasion pay for advertising. This will include paying for articles to appear in publications produced by our partners such as *Inside Halton* and Cheshire West and Chester's *Talking Together*.

Insight has also proved that paying for advertising on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter could also be beneficial to campaigns. Radio advertising can also prove useful.

Whether or not a campaign or consultation is backed by paid for advertising will be decided on a case by case basis.

5.8 Website

This is an important element of our communication as it will be the first point that many people turn to for information about the Service. The website will also provide us the main route to ensure that the service remains transparent and open about its performance data. We will always seek to link people to the website from other communication channels such as Twitter and Facebook posts.

Insight data into the numbers of people accessing the intranet on their smartphone or other mobile devices mean that it is essential that our website is able to be viewed on multiple platforms.

5.9 Face- to-face.

We may be living in a technological era but this does not remove the fact that the most powerful form of communication comes through face-to-face contact. This will be something that the Service will use to communicate both internal and external messages. It will include staff and political briefing sessions, corporate events and other engagement activity such as school visits.

Programmes such as the Safe and Well Visits also use face-to-face communication to deliver key Service messages.

5.10 Facebook and Twitter.

These two social media platforms will be primarily used for external communication and consultation activity. They are a useful tool to engage in two-way conversations with the public. Facebook and Twitter are also useful to keep people updated during fast moving emergency incidents.

We will also use the platforms to show public support for partner campaigns through 'retweeting'. The two platforms will also enable us to monitor conversations and

emerging issues that may impact on the Service and require further communication action.

5.11 You Tube

Obviously there is a key link here to the use of video however, it is important to list the two separately. We will continue to enhance our You Tube channel to ensure that it contains a range of videos that educate and celebrate people about the work of the Service. Unlike the videos that we use on social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook we are able to use longer videos on You Tube, making it more suitable for more in-depth content.

5.12 Posters and leaflets.

These will be produced to support campaign activity when appropriate and when they enhance a multi-channel campaign.

5.13 Other social media sites

In addition to Facebook, Twitter and You Tube the Service will also aim to use and have a presence on a range of social media platforms including Instagram and Flickr. It will also remain flexible to emerging sites in order to react and capitalise on new ways of reaching people.

6 Proposition and top-line messaging.

The following key messages can be described as the Service's top-line messages - the most important points we wish to get across to our audiences:

- We are working to make Cheshire safer.
- Our staff are trained to the highest possible standards.
- People are proud to work for Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service cares about its staff and communities.

7 Stakeholders

This section highlights who the Service's key stakeholders are both in terms of people we wish to inform, those we wish to influence and those who can help us achieve our communication goals.

Fire Authority	Cheshire MPs	Our Staff	Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Councils	Cheshire, Halton and Warrington Chief Execs and Leaders
Business Community	Wider community of Cheshire	People aged over 65	People aged under 25	School aged children
Cheshire Constabulary and the PCC	NWAS	Other Partner organisations (such as NHS, Age UK and the Environment Agency).	Cheshire Elected Members	Minister of State for Crime, Policing and fire and rescue services.
Home Secretary	Other Fire and Rescue Services	Local Press	Regional Press	National Media

Please note this is a comprehensive list but not an exclusive one. Other groups and organisations may become key stakeholders from time to time as issues or campaigns arise.

8 Resources.

This section highlights some of the resources require to implement this strategy.

8.1 Strategy lead.

This strategy will be led and overseen by the Corporate Communications team that sits within the Policy, Planning and Communications department. Although, delivery of communication elements and reputation management will be considered a Service wide objective.

8.2 Use of agency support.

The vast majority of communication activity will be delivered by the Service's in-house team. However, on occasions the decision may be made to use additional external resource. This will be done on a case by case basis but must involve Corporate Communications in the procurement process.

8.3 Budget.

The Service will have a central budget for communication fund. However, additional funding will be brought in from other departments to support specific activity. All campaign and communication projects must be subject to an evaluation to ensure continued value for money is achieved.

8.4 Training.

A programme of media training and awareness sessions will run on an annual basis to ensure that relevant operational staff are trained in reputation management, working with the media (including social media). Some of these sessions will be delivered by external trainers and some by members of the Corporate Communications team.

9 **Interdependencies.**

This strategy is closely linked and supported by the following two strategies:

- Consultation and Engagement Strategy.
- Digital Media Strategy.

It is also supported by the Corporate Identity Guidelines and Photography Policy.

10 **Risks**

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Staff leaving the department.	A loss of staff would result in a loss of knowledge within the department. This would have an impact on communication delivery especially in specialist areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Process maps developed for all key tasks. • Staff trained so that there is task resilience within the teams.
Blue Light Collaboration.	<p>This a major programme that could take up a considerable amount of time for the department.</p> <p>The results of a merged department could also impact on the delivery of fire objectives as the team begins to deliver two organisations communication activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning is underway to ensure Service Level Agreements are developed to prepare for a merged communication function.
Loss of systems.	A loss in our ICT Systems could impact the department's ability to deliver core functions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resilience put in place to ensure most key applications are web based. • A number of lap tops are available to the team so that they can be used off site.

11 Monitoring and evaluation.

To ensure that the Communication Strategy remains on track to deliver its objectives all internal and external communication activity will be monitored throughout implementation.

All Service communication campaigns will be accompanied by a specific plan and set of SMART Objectives. This plan will also need to detail how the success of each objective can be evaluated.

Appendix One: Examples of the communication channels we will use.

The following table gives an overview of the tools that may be used to communicate with different stakeholders. Although, it must be stressed that it may be necessary to adapt and enhance the mechanisms from time to time. All Service campaigns will be subject to individual Communication Plans that will set out in detail which particular channels will be used to ensure messages reach our target audiences effectively.

Stakeholder	Communication Aim	Example Comms Channels
Fire Authority Members	<p>To keep members informed about what is happening within the Service. Also to make them aware of any external factors that could impact on the Service's performance.</p> <p>Members need to be provided with the right level of information required to help them make decisions as an Authority.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Meetings • 'Buddy system' • Telephone • Reports and publications.
Staff	<p>Further develop two-way internal communications to ensure effective staff engagement.</p> <p>To promote corporate aims and objectives and understanding of policy initiatives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Green Bulletin • Alert newsletter • Intranet • One-ones with managers • Staff briefings • Breakfast with the Chief • Video content • Email
Home Secretary and the Minister of State for Crime, Policing and Fire and Rescue Services	<p>To increase awareness of the Service's corporate policies, aims and objectives.</p> <p>To raise the profile of the work that the Service and its staff are undertaking.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link newsletter • Personal briefings • Specialist media • Professional groups – CFA • Email

Cheshire MPs	<p>To increase awareness of the Service's corporate policies, aims and objectives.</p> <p>Also to keep them informed about incidents or emerging issues in their areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link newsletter • Personal briefings • Specialist media • Professional groups – CFOA • Email
Other Cheshire Elected Members	<p>To increase awareness of the Service's corporate policies, aims and objectives.</p> <p>Also to keep them informed about incidents or emerging issues in their areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheshire Alert System • Social media • Website • Briefings at relevant committees and meetings.
Local Council Leaders and Chief Execs	<p>To increase awareness of the Service's corporate policies, aims and objectives.</p> <p>To encourage a two-way conversation about how we can work together to make Cheshire Safer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link newsletter • Annual Report • Personal briefings • Events • Email • Telephone
Business Community	<p>To enhancing two-way communication with the business community to both promote the work of the Service and ensure that they understand their requirements to keep their staff and customers safe.</p> <p>To keep people informed about what to do in the event of a major emergency and encourage participation in Service Consultation activity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheshire Alert System • Twitter/Facebook • Video output • Website • Press coverage • You Tube • Link Newsletter • Events • Inspection visits.
People aged over 65	<p>To ensure that they have the necessary information to stay safe and well.</p> <p>To keep people informed about what to do in the event of a major emergency and encourage participation in Service Consultation activity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe and Well Visits • Local Press • Letters • Facebook/Twitter • Website
People aged under 25	To ensure a two-way dialogue about the Service's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Twitter/Facebook • Instagram

	<p>Youth Programme and how they can stay safe at home and on the road.</p> <p>Also to encourage them to take an active role in Service consultations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You Tube • Local press • Events • College visits • Cadet Units • Prince's Trust Programme
School aged children	To ensure that children are aware of the Service and understand how they can stay safe from fire and other emergencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School visits • 'Sparkton' section of the website • Events • Station Open Days
Wider Cheshire Community	<p>To ensure that we develop a two-way dialogue with the community about how they can keep themselves safe from fire and other emergencies.</p> <p>To keep people informed about what to do in the event of a major emergency and encourage participation in Service Consultation activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cheshire Alert System • Annual Report • Consultation Roadshows • Events • Social media (all) • Video output • Email • Letters.
Partner organisations (Cheshire Constabulary, NWAS etc.)	<p>To increase awareness of the Service's corporate policies, aims and objectives.</p> <p>To encourage a two-way conversation about how we can work together to make Cheshire Safer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal briefings • Email • Meetings • Partner Newsletter • Telephone • Incident debriefs
Other Fire and Rescue Services	To increase awareness of the Service's corporate policies, aims and objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal briefings • Email • Meetings • Partner Newsletter • Telephone • Trade Press • Events
The press	<p>To promote awareness of key messages and encourage them to highlight them to their readership.</p> <p>To work with them to protect and enhance the Service's reputation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Press releases • Twitter/Facebook • Website • Press calls • Video output • Interviews

