

APPENDIX 1

Draft External Communications and Engagement Strategy 2024-28

v1.1 for Cheshire Fire Authority
approval



Cheshire
Fire & Rescue Service
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1. Introduction

- 1.1 No fire and rescue service can successfully fulfil its purpose of saving and protecting lives without maintaining the trust and confidence of the communities it serves and the partners with whom it works. This relies on clear, consistent and planned communication, and meaningful engagement. Without either, services are unlikely to be able to communicate effectively in an emergency, encourage people to stay safe, provide assurance of their performance, involve people in developing their plans, develop partnerships or recruit fresh and diverse talent.
- 1.2 This External Communications and Engagement Strategy provides a framework for the way in which Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service will talk, listen and respond to the public and its stakeholders over the next four years (2024-28), by:
- describing a fresh approach to external communications and engagement
 - mapping our key external audiences
 - referencing the many and varied channels available to us
 - defining three strategic external communications and engagement objectives and how we will achieve these through ‘business as usual’ activity, and new ways of reaching people
 - explaining how we will deliver and monitor progress against these objectives.
- 1.3 The strategy directly supports the delivery of our strategic vision, mission and the objectives set out in our Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-28 and supersedes our previous Corporate Communications and Consultation and Engagement strategies.
- 1.4 A separate Internal Communications and Engagement Strategy will be published in Q1 2024 to strengthen dialogue with staff, volunteers and Cheshire Fire Authority members.

Definitions

Communication: process of exchanging information, thoughts or ideas.

Engagement: active participation or interaction in a particular subject or issue.

Consultation: formal process of gathering views or information from people or organisations affected by an issue or proposal.

Campaign: series of co-ordinated communications activities designed to achieve a goal or promote a cause.

Audience: individuals or groups who receive a message or are encouraged to engage.

Message: information or ideas communicated with the intention of transmitting meaning or influencing thoughts, attitudes or actions.

Channel: medium or platform through which messages are communicated.

Stakeholder: an individual, group, or organisation with a vested interest or concern in a particular issue.

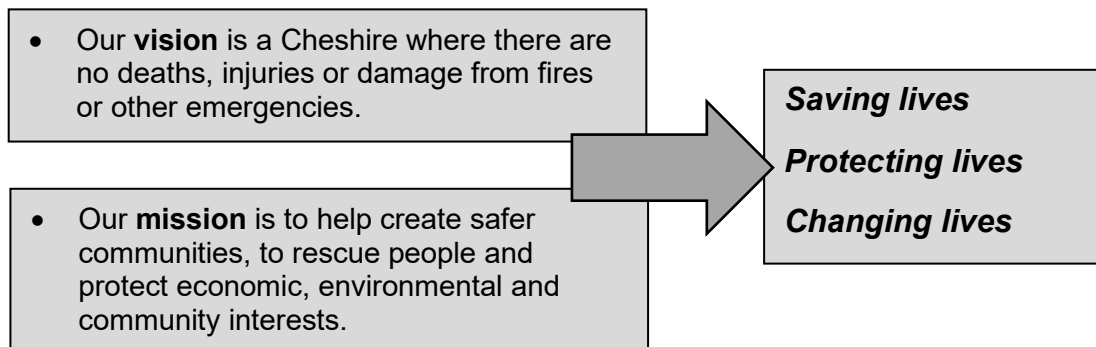
2. Context

Statutory responsibilities

- 2.1 As a publicly funded and accountable organisation with lifesaving responsibilities, we have a statutory and moral duty to be open and transparent about our work, our performance, and our risks and challenges. This requirement is set out in legislation and in the regulatory framework in which we operate:
- under the [Fire and Rescue Framework for England](#) we must “be transparent and accountable to [our] communities for [our] decisions and actions” and “provide the opportunity for communities to help plan their local service through effective consultation and involvement”
 - we are required under the [Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004](#) “to make arrangements for the provision of information, publicity and encouragement in respect of the steps to be taken to prevent fires and death or injury by fire”. This includes during periods of industrial action or disrupted service
 - effective communication is crucial to our duties under the [Civil Contingencies Act 2004](#), to prevent emergencies and reduce, control or mitigate their effects. The Cheshire Resilience Forum (CRF) media protocol sets out the ways we will do this in co-operation with our partners
 - as an authority that receives a share of council tax, Cheshire Fire Authority is required under the [Localism Act 2011](#) to consult on the amount charged and run a referendum if proposed increases are over a certain threshold. The Act also offers a “community right to challenge” public authorities
 - the [Gunning Principles](#) set the standard by which public consultation must be undertaken, ensuring that stakeholders are engaged when proposals are at a formative stage, that they have enough information and time to respond and that responses are given proper consideration. These principles are affirmed in the [Consultation Institute Charter](#)
 - the [Fire Standard for Communications and Engagement](#) (Appendix 1) sets out 19 actions services should take to implement a strategic and inclusive approach to communications. These also support compliance with the [Community Risk Management and Planning](#), [Leading the Service](#) and the [Code of Ethics](#) fire standards.
 - [His Majesty’s Inspectorate for Constabularies and Fire and Rescue Services \(HMICFRS\) judgement criteria](#) require us to engage with the community to build up a comprehensive risk profile, promote fire and road safety, engage effectively with businesses and communicate information about incidents to the public.

Organisational factors

2.2 Effective communication and engagement is critical to the delivery of our organisational vision and mission. These statements also serve to provide the two principal messages that should underpin all our communications and engagement activity. In recent years, these have been summarised in some of our communications materials by a simple, now recognisable, three-part 'strapline':



2.3 Our vision and mission are delivered through the objectives set out in our CRMP, the next iteration of which comes into effect in April 2024 and will run until March 2028. Not only will progress towards these objectives need to be regularly communicated, but many of the actions will also require significant communications support. These include:

- explaining the impact of changes to the way some fire stations and fire engines are crewed, with the aim of improving daytime emergency cover and increasing community safety activities
- reporting performance against redefined response targets
- supporting Prevention colleagues to:
 - improve and promote the referral process for Safe and Well visits
 - promote safety information about lithium-ion batteries
 - reduce the occurrence of deliberate fires
 - implement a new Road Safety Strategic Plan for Cheshire
 - increase water safety education activity
 - train advocates and firefighters to deliver safety messages more effectively.
- supporting Protection colleagues to:
 - communicate any changes to our risk-based inspection programme
 - lobby and campaign for the installation of sprinklers.
- supporting Service-wide efforts to:
 - attract a diverse range of talent to our organisation, strengthening the positive and inclusive culture we have worked hard to create

- continue to engage former staff as ambassadors for our Service after they have retired or left the organisation
 - modernise or replace our fire stations, engaging the community in our plans where relevant.
- 2.4 In addition to their CRMP objectives, departments also deliver ‘business as usual’ activity, much of which will require communications and engagement input. This will continue to be considered as part of the annual departmental planning process, in line with the approach set out in this strategy.
- 2.5 While our vision, mission, CRMP and departmental plans set out what we do, our Core Values (together with the national fire and rescue service [Code of Ethics](#)) describe the *ways in which we do it*. These behaviours provide a solid foundation for our approach to communications and engagement (p8).

- **Being inclusive**, by acting fairly, with integrity and without prejudice.
- **Doing the right thing**, by holding each other to account for ensuring high standards of professionalism in everything we do.
- **Acting with compassion**, by being understanding and offering to help each other and our communities with warmth, patience and kindness.
- **Making a difference**, by making an impact in our organisation and in our communities in whatever ways we can, for as many people as we can.

Public perception

- 2.6 The fire and rescue service is highly valued by the public and has a unique standing that allows us into communities and homes. According to HMICFRS’s 2022 public perception survey, 84% of people value the work of the fire and rescue service and 82% said they respect people who have a career in the sector. Furthermore, 67% of people who took part in a 2023 survey to help shape our CRMP proposals said that we offer value for money.
- 2.7 However, there are significant threats to the fire and rescue service’s hard-earned reputation. Throughout 2023 and into 2024, the spotlight has fallen on workplace culture in the sector following highly critical reports into the conduct of staff in several services. In some instances, this has been evident in the inappropriate use of social media by fire and rescue service personnel. In 2024 HMICFRS will publish a further, wide-ranging culture report.
- 2.8 Meanwhile, the operational reliability of the service has also been called into question after public inquiries highlighted shortcomings in the operational responses to the Grenfell Tower fire and Manchester Arena attack in 2017.
- 2.9 Our challenge is to retain the trust and confidence of the public in the face of negative national media coverage. It is crucial that we promote and celebrate our successes, particularly in areas for which the fire and rescue service has

been criticised. At the same time, we should be open and transparent about where we need to improve and have plans in place to deal with issues that might negatively impact our reputation.

The changing nature of public sector communications

- 2.9 The emergence of social media platforms over the last two decades has transformed the way in which people receive, process and share information. Gone are the days where we wait patiently for public sector organisations to share news with us through a local newspaper or marketing material delivered through our front door. We now value communication that is immediate, authentic and two-way. We are no longer prepared to read reams of text and prefer to engage with short-form video content or images.
- 2.10 We have invested significantly in our digital communications capability over the last 15 years. In May 2023 we launched a new website that enables us to present information in a much more dynamic way. We also have roles dedicated to social media, graphic design and visual storytelling, and have attracted a considerable following across several social media platforms. In the years ahead, we must be prepared to be bolder, braver and more creative if we are to continue engaging audiences in our important work. We must also refine the mechanisms through which people can talk to us and make our communications channels truly two-way.
- 2.11 The nature of media relations is also changing. Journalists no longer work to daily or weekly deadlines, instead publishing stories instantly on social media platforms or websites. This requires us to move swiftly to take advantage of opportunities to promote our work or respond to negative issues. Audiences are also able to engage with news stories through comments threads, which require close monitoring – and sometimes intervention – to ensure misinformation and disinformation is addressed. Relationships with ‘citizen journalists’ such as influencers, podcasters, bloggers and vloggers, who may not have formal journalism training, must also be carefully managed.
- 2.12 The Government Communications Service describes a “double crisis of trust, in both governments and communications”. To address this, it recommends that communications and engagement activity is “citizen centric” and informed by evidence, including behavioural insight, to ensure it is credible and connects with audiences.
- 2.13 Finally, it is important to remember that staff are also members of the general public, and therefore follow and engage with our external communications channels. While this may be useful as an additional way of conveying important information and building a sense of ‘belonging’, messages must be consistent with those conveyed through internal communications and engagement channels.

3. A fresh approach to communications and engagement

- 3.1 There are four guiding principles, reflecting our Core Values, that will underpin the delivery of this strategy over the next four years. Our objective will be to ensure that all external communications and engagement activity is undertaken in a way that is strategic, professional, impactful and inclusive.
- 3.2 This in turn will reinforce our brand, which is one of our most valuable assets as a fire and rescue service. The term ‘brand’ describes how we look (i.e. our logo, strapline and colour scheme), how we talk and listen to people and, most importantly, how we make people feel about us. To ensure our brand remains strong, distinctive and trusted, our communications must be designed, produced and delivered consistently. These principles support that ambition.

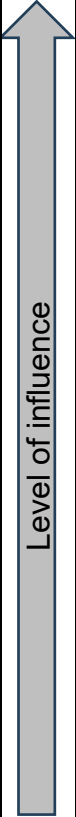
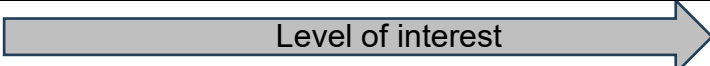
<p>Strategic</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directly supporting work towards our vision, mission and CRMP objectives. • Carefully planned and resourced to focus on high priority, high impact activity. • Founded on evidence of what works. • Implemented and evaluated using the communications industry-standard OASIS model (below), to achieve clearly defined outcomes. • Delivered in collaboration with key partners where required. 	<p>Professional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively led by the Communications and Engagement Team, under the direction of the Service Leadership Team. • Open, honest and accurate. • Responsive to the needs of colleagues, the media and stakeholders. • Compliant with relevant legislation and supported by clear and up to date policies and procedures. • Reflective of industry good practice, through engagement in continuous professional development.
<p>Impactful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focussed on telling the story of our Service through our people and the people we serve. • Utilising creative, well-produced, high quality written and audio-visual content. • Consistent in the use of our visual corporate identity, including logo and strapline. • Employing new and innovative ways of reaching all audiences. • Actively encouraging feedback, engagement and conversation. 	<p>Inclusive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking to our audiences as real people; in the first person, in plain English and with warmth and professionalism. • Making it clear how to access information in alternative formats if required. • Visibly championing diversity in our Service by using inclusive imagery and language. • Supported by equality impact assessments on significant campaign projects.



4. Defining our audiences

4.1 Different external audiences have very different communications and engagement needs, depending on the nature of our relationship and their level of interest and influence in our Service. Some share our aims, values and ambitions and may speak or act as advocates for us if kept informed. Others may require closer involvement if we rely on them to help us deliver our objectives. Those who stake their reputation in full or in part on our performance require the closest engagement.

4.2 The table below plots the relative interest and influence of our main groups of stakeholders. This map is dynamic because an individual or group's level of interest and influence can change depending on the subject matter or issue, or the stage of our relationship. By using the OASIS model to plan activity, we will consider where a stakeholder lies on this map, their needs and preferences, and the most appropriate communications tactics to reach and engage them.

 Level of influence	<p>Keep satisfied</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civic leaders and dignitaries – e.g. mayors, Lord Lieutenant and High Sheriff • Fire Standards Board • Local authority councillors • National Fire Chiefs Council • National mainstream media • Parish, town and district councillors • Regional mainstream media 	<p>Engage closely</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former members of staff • Home Office • HMICFRS • Local mainstream media • Members of Parliament • Primary Authority partners • Statutory and CRF partners – e.g. Cheshire Constabulary, North West Ambulance Service and local authorities
	<p>Monitor</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business network groups • Community groups • General public with no perceived need to engage with us: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ future Safe and Well customers ○ future participants in children and young people's programmes ○ future employees and volunteers 	<p>Keep informed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses • Housing partners • Neighbouring fire and rescue services • North West Fire Control • Prevention partners – e.g. health and social care agencies, referral partners, Prince's Trust, schools and colleges • Professional/trade media • Public actively engage in our services • Public impacted by changes • Safeguarding partners – e.g. local authority designated officers
	 Level of interest	

5. Our communications and engagement toolbox

5.1 Careful consideration will also be given to the mix of communications and engagement channels used to reach our target audiences. The richest channels use face-to-face interaction to engage, build trust and connection, and convey complex or sensitive messages. The leanest channels are one-way and should be used for communicating urgent or simple messages.

		Non-paid	Paid
Richest channels	Physical presence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-1 briefings • Celebration events like award ceremonies, graduations and passouts • Community roadshows and drop-in events • Conferences and seminars • Deliberative workshops • In-house focus groups • Open days • Presentations or talks at external events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioned focus groups • Stands or enclosures at events or exhibitions • Attendance at paid-for events, to represent Service
	Personal interactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virtual focus groups • Webinars and virtual events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mystery shopping • Sponsored social media
Leanest channels	Impersonal interactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blogs and vlogs • Email • Engagement with citizen journalists • In-house surveys, polls and feedback forms • News releases to media outlets with capability for interaction • Social media posts, videos and stories • Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commissioned surveys, polls and feedback questionnaires
	Impersonal static	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articles in partner publications • E-bulletins • Leaflets, flyers and booklets • Letters • Neighbourhood Alert • Newsletters • News releases to print and broadcast media outlets • Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising in event programmes, guides or partner publications • Digital advertising • Print advertising • Television and radio advertising
	Ambient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posters in public areas • Signage and banners • Uniform • Vehicle livery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising outdoors, on public transport or in specific venues • Promotional merchandise

6. Objectives

6.1 Over the next four years we will focus our external communications and engagement efforts on three strategic objectives that will enable us to meet our statutory obligations and address the challenges outlined on the previous pages. Each objective will be delivered through core communications and engagement activity, plus actions under key workstreams to improve and increase our reach and impact.

Strategic Objective 1

Communicate messages that enable people to take action to keep themselves and others safe.

Core activity:

- Proactive and reactive media relations, including out of hours cover for urgent operational issues – guided by Media Protocol and Procedures.
- Publishing information about noteworthy incidents on website.
- Social media updates when incidents cause disruption or concern.
- Regular participation in major incident exercises.
- Supporting local, regional and national public and business safety campaigns.
- Proactively promoting successful fire safety prosecutions.
- Attending community events to raise awareness of safety issues.

Development objectives:

<i>Public warning and informing</i>	
Provide accurate, authoritative and timely information that minimises the risk of harm in the event of an emergency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Undertake training with CRF partners' communications leads on new joint media protocol.➤ Review effectiveness of existing Neighbourhood Alert SMS and email system.➤ Agree and work towards targets for increasing following on social media channels to increase public reach.➤ Deliver media training to station, group and area managers to build confidence and competence in being interviewed.

<p>Work with the CRF and statutory partners to help people prepare for emergencies with the potential to have a significant impact on the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Support development and implementation of joint public awareness campaign and communications resources.
<p>Provide information about how to access our services during times of disruption or high demand.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review and update Communications and Engagement Business Continuity Plan in line with CRF joint media protocol. ➤ Agree protocol with Cumbria, Greater Manchester and Lancashire fire and rescue services' communications leads for dealing with disruption to North West Fire Control.

<p><i>Prevention</i></p>	
<p>Develop and deliver no more than three high impact, high quality campaigns per year, to address key community safety issues identified in the CRMP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement campaign in 2024/25 focussed on dangers of lithium-ion batteries and charging. ➤ Work with Arson Reduction Manager to strengthen messaging relating to deliberate fire setting. ➤ Work with Road Safety Team to support sub-regional road safety strategy and implementation of awareness campaign. ➤ Work with new Water Safety Lead to support regional water safety strategy and implementation of awareness campaign. ➤ Refresh communications team's knowledge and understanding of latest behaviour change techniques.
<p>Support the delivery of a revitalised Safe and Well programme.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Update Safe and Well booklet. ➤ Raise awareness among health and social care partners of fire risk and referral routes. ➤ Explain and promote new targeting strategy.
<p>Promote full range of Prevention interventions, to change public perception about scope of fire and rescue service activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Aim for one third of external communications output to be Prevention focussed. ➤ Identify single points of contact and communications plan for each area of Prevention, to ensure information and news about services is shared with communications team and onwards to relevant audiences. ➤ Use station open days as opportunities to better promote prevention work and safety messages.

<i>Protection</i>	
Support national efforts to lobby and campaign for changes to fire safety legislation in the built environment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use case studies to promote the value of sprinklers in commercial premises and in high-risk residential buildings like tower blocks. ➤ Undertake public affairs activity to support NFCC work around planning for battery energy storage sites.
Promote full range of Protection interventions, to change public perception about scope of fire and rescue service activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Aim for one third of external communications output to be Protection focussed. ➤ Identify single points of contact and communications plan for each area of Protection to ensure information and news about services is shared with communications team and onwards to relevant audiences. ➤ Inform relevant stakeholders of any changes to risk-based inspection programme. ➤ Implement Beechmere and Hazelmere prosecutions stakeholder engagement plan.

Strategic Objective 2

Maintain public and stakeholder trust and confidence in us as a public service, partner and employer.

Core activity:

- Proactive and reactive media relations, including out of hours cover for urgent reputational issues.
- Production of key reports like CRMP, annual plans and annual reports.
- Communications planning for potential adverse reputational issues.
- Involvement in wide range of sub-regional and sector meetings and forums.

Development objectives:

<i>Strategy and performance</i>	
Widely promote performance against objectives, targets and standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Develop dedicated e-bulletin to share news with high interest/high influence stakeholders. ➤ Review format of CRMP progress report/annual action plan to ensure information presented in lively and engaging way. ➤ Work with Service Improvement Team to create public-facing digital performance dashboard on website.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Use publication of annual statements of assurance and accounts as opportunities to demonstrate value for money. ➤ Routinely promote achievement of objectives and targets through social and mainstream media, and to stakeholders. ➤ Work with partners to publicise successes in partnership working – e.g. work with children and young people or adults at risk.
Communicate openly and in detail about performance in external/independent assessments and accreditations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Publicise results of HMICFRS, ISO, Matrix and other independent assessments, providing updates on areas for improvement where required. ➤ Promote accreditations such as White Ribbon, Disability Confident and Top 50 Inclusive Companies by describing difference made to staff and service users. ➤ Publicise nominations, shortlists and wins in awards schemes. Ensure award branding is used on relevant sections of website.
Develop more effective relationships with local, regional and national/trade journalists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Schedule regular briefings with key reporters. ➤ Develop programme of opportunities for media outlets to profile our work. ➤ Track and evaluate media coverage more consistently on media management system.

<i>People and culture</i>	
Position Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service as an employer of choice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refresh recruitment section of the website, being clearer about benefits of working or volunteering for us and profiling wider range of roles. ➤ Promote and support positive action activity, using digital channels to engage people where relevant. ➤ Support recruitment, prevention and staff network colleagues to engage young people through careers events and work experience placements.
Be more transparent about equality, diversity and inclusion performance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Involve a range of stakeholders in development of new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Strategy 2024-28 and proactively promote its publication and EDI annual reports. ➤ Summarise and publish workforce diversity information presented to Equality Steering Group on website, to demonstrate progress.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Include pay gap data relating to ethnicity and disability in Gender Pay Gap report and promote its publication more widely. ➤ Promote improvements resulting from recommendations from cultural reviews in sector.
Challenge stereotypes and assumptions of what it means to work for the fire and rescue service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Regularly profile work of non-operational departments and diverse range of staff. ➤ Actively manage external communications output to ensure incident-related or operational news is balanced with information about other Service areas. ➤ Support participation in diverse range of community events.
Ensure presence on social media and engagement with the public supports our Core Values and communications and engagement principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review all Service social media accounts, with a view to focussing efforts, monitoring and moderation on those with most engagement. ➤ Produce new fit-for-purpose Social Media Policy, enabling inappropriate responses to Service content to be managed and ensure use of personal social media by staff does not bring Service into disrepute.

Strategic Objective 3

Give people and partners a meaningful role in the delivery and development of our services.

Core activity:

- CRMP pre-engagement and consultation programmes on behalf of Cheshire Fire Authority
- Council Tax precept consultation on behalf of Cheshire Fire Authority
- Regular briefings and meetings between principal officers and key stakeholders.
- Feedback through website, email and customer satisfaction forms.

Development objectives:

<i>Consultation</i>	
Ensure as many people as possible, of all ages and backgrounds, have the opportunity to have a say on	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Re-establish annual public perception survey. ➤ Evaluate participation in 2023/24 CRMP consultation and make recommendations for strengthening future processes.

our work and that feedback is continuously considered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Assess viability of re-establishing citizens' panel, representative of Cheshire's demography. ➤ Consistently collate, report on and respond to feedback left on social media platforms.
Adopt a planned approach to key stakeholder engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Determine interest in annual stakeholder conference, delivered in-person and virtually. ➤ Ensure stakeholder e-bulletin includes mechanism for two-way dialogue.

<i>Customer feedback</i>	
Understand the experience of people we have assisted in a fire, road traffic collision or other emergency.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explore alternatives to existing 'After the Incident' hard copy survey, including digital survey options and follow-up telephone calls. ➤ Put in place mechanism for feedback reports to be consistently produced and considered.
Understand the experience of people for whom we have undertaken a Safe and Well visit or other Prevention interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explore alternatives to existing 'Home Safety Visit' hard copy survey, including digital survey options and follow-up telephone calls, that support Prevention's quality assurance process. ➤ Look at options for gathering feedback from children and young people, schools, partners and other users of Prevention services. ➤ Put in place mechanism for feedback reports to be consistently produced and considered.
Understand the experience of businesses visited or supported by Protection colleagues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explore alternatives to existing 'Business Safety Visit' hard copy survey, including digital survey options and follow-up telephone calls. ➤ Put in place mechanism for reports to be consistently produced and considered.

<i>Engaging former colleagues</i>	
Recognise and harness the interest and influence of people who have worked for us through a plan to keep them informed and engaged in our work.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create official Service retirees and 'alumni' network, with clear terms of reference, brand and dedicated channels for dialogue including a social media page, e-bulletin and/or hard copy newsletter. ➤ Establish annual reunion event and open day at Headquarters. ➤ Support regular informal meetings in fire station community rooms.

7. Making it happen

- 7.1 This strategy will be approved by Cheshire Fire Authority prior to implementation and the Head of Communications and Engagement will be responsible for its delivery, with oversight from the Deputy Chief Fire Officer. Significant external communications and engagement projects and issues will continue to be discussed by SLT and where relevant the Fire Authority will be informed and consulted. This should ensure communications and engagement is routinely considered as part of strategic decision making.
- 7.2 To implement this strategy the Head of Department will draw on the skills and talents of the Communications and Engagement Department, which will continue to be resourced to reflect our Service's ongoing commitment to talking and listening effectively to our diverse range of stakeholders. The team will work closely with colleagues to understand their communications and engagement challenges, especially those with public and partner-facing roles in Prevention and Protection. However, to deliver our new approach to communications and engagement (p8), the team will be responsible for developing OASIS-based project plans and have editorial control over all content (with reference to SLT where required).
- 7.3 Objectives will be set out in the annual Departmental Plan and progress will be monitored at weekly managers' meetings, fortnightly 1-1s and quarterly department-wide meetings. To assess progress against the objectives, the following information will be considered:
- data drawn from our online media and stakeholder relations management system, including interactions with journalists, numbers of proactive news releases issued, and level and favourability of media coverage
 - social media and website analytics, detailing levels of engagement
 - evaluation of specific campaign activity, for example insight gathered about changes in behaviour or awareness of key messages
 - communications and engagement project requests from colleagues
 - feedback gathered through surveys, polls and other mechanisms
 - compliments or concerns about the service provided by the Department
 - review of any departmental risks
 - annual self-assessment against the Fire Standard for Communications and Engagement.

Appendix 1

Fire Standard for Communications and Engagement

To achieve this Fire Standard, a fire and rescue service MUST:

- have a strategic approach to communications and engagement, including consultation, which includes clear principles about how the organisation will communicate with its audiences, aligned to organisational goals of the service, its values and the principles contained within the Core Code of Ethics
- have leaders that support the strategic approach to communications and engagement and are exemplars in good communication behaviours and principles, aligned to those included in the NFCC Leadership Framework
- ensure that everyone in the Service understands their responsibilities in relation to communications and engagement
- have an appropriately resourced and competent communications and engagement capacity that:
 - a. plans for and manages reactive communication issues such as crises and emergencies, working with local resilience partners;
 - b. plans proactive communications internally and externally;
 - c. carries out meaningful engagement exercises and consultations, aligned to the Gunning Principles to inform strategic direction and support decision making processes.
- have a resilient out of hours arrangement to handle enquiries and manage communications during crises and emergencies, in line with the requirements of the emergency preparedness and resilience fire standard.
- support, train and develop those working within its communications and engagement capacity (where they are employed within a service) encouraging them to maintain their competency and keep developing their skills, knowledge and new methods of communication through continued professional development
- deliver inclusive and accessible communications, recognising that every workforce, community and group has different and diverse needs
- evaluate communications and engagement activity to see whether objectives have been met and if there are any lessons that can be learned and shared.

To achieve this Fire Standard, a fire and rescue service SHOULD:

- involve the most senior communications professional in their service in discussions with the leadership team about matters affecting the organisation to ensure communications and engagement aspects are always considered
- ensure all departments liaise with and take advice from the communications and engagement functions as early as possible, when requiring any communications or engagement activity
- use an established and consistent communications planning framework for communications and campaign work
- place an emphasis on stakeholder relationships and management, mapping and analysing key stakeholders, prioritising audiences and managing influencers
- use established behavioural science methods to develop interventions and influence positive behaviour change
- use audience insight to inform and tailor communications and engagement activities, clearly defining and targeting audiences
- have a collaborative approach to communications and engagement both within the service and with partners and stakeholders
- seek to build effective relationships with relevant media outlets, proactively and collectively planning stories, building mutual understanding and exchanging feedback about proactive and reactive stories
- stay well informed of new communications and engagement methods and techniques, applying them where appropriate.

A fire and rescue service MAY:

- enhance its engagement approach by partnering with key stakeholders to co-design service delivery to best meet community needs
- professionalise the communications and engagement functions by investing in their continued professional development through membership of a recognised professional body.