

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 25TH SEPTEMBER 2024
REPORT OF: HEAD OF COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT
AUTHOR: MARK SHONE

SUBJECT: ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Member approval for the release of the Annual Report 2023-24 in website and social media format.

Recommended: that

- [1] Members approve the release of the Annual Report 2023-24 in website and social media format.

Background

2. The Authority must publish certain information about its accounts and governance arrangements. The Authority is also required to comply with the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework concerning the provision of information to communities about its performance. The publication of the Annual Report helps the Authority to meet these obligations and promotes the availability of the annual statement of accounts on the Service's website.

Information

3. The Authority is committed to keeping its residents, businesses and key stakeholders informed about the development of its services and policies and its performance against its published plans. This is an objective of the External Communications and Engagement Strategy 2024-28, approved by the Authority in February 2024.
4. The last printed version of the annual report was produced in 2018. Between 2019 and last year, it was produced as a digital-only document, downloadable from Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service's website. Analysis of visits to the website showed that in spite of promoting the annual report internally and externally, the page including the link to the Annual Report 2021-22 received approximately 200 visits.
5. For this reason, the Communications and Engagement Team sought approval from Members in September 2023 to produce and publish the Annual Report

2022-23 as a short two-minute video. This was published on the Service's YouTube channel and website, and widely promoted internally and externally. In spite of efforts to bring key performance information to life in this way, to date the video has received only 230 views.

6. The Communications and Engagement Team has undertaken further research into approaches to present public sector performance information in a way that reaches and engages more people. As such, the team is proposing to present the Annual Report 2023-24 in the form of multi-image social media posts, with live links to more detailed background information on the annual report section of the Service's website.
7. The social media posts will present headline performance figures in a striking graphic design style, under the title 'Our Year in Numbers'. They will be published on the Service's Facebook, X, LinkedIn, Instagram and TikTok accounts, which have a combined reach of 117,000 users.
8. Benefits of this approach include:
 - appealing to a general shift towards the public engaging with 'short form' information, rather than lengthy videos or text
 - the ability to target specific messages to each channel's audience, for example home safety information to Facebook's older demographic and information about children and young people's programmes on TikTok
 - linking the annual report web page to detailed information elsewhere on the website, for example to performance reports, financial information and details of the Service's work around equality, diversity and inclusion
 - the ability to increase engagement through limited paid-for posts
 - the ability to engage in two-way dialogue with residents who comment on the posts or ask for further information
 - the ability to measure engagement on each channel, enabling the Communications and Engagement Team to refine its approach further, next year.
9. If Members are satisfied with presenting the annual report in this format, the social media posts and supporting web page will be published before the end of September.

Financial Implications

10. It is proposed that £500 be used from the Communications and Engagement campaign budget, to boost engagement with the social media posts.

Legal Implications

11. The Service has a statutory requirement to publish its statement of accounts. Presentation of the annual report in this new format will help to publicise this to a larger audience. There is no legal requirement to print and distribute an annual report.

Equality and Diversity Implications

12. This approach to publishing the annual report should increase engagement with a diverse range of audience groups, presenting numerical and textual information in a simple and innovative way. Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service website is highly accessible to a range of users.

Environmental Implications

13. Digital publication of the annual report negates the need for printed paper copies and the road travel impact of physical distribution.

**CONTACT: DONNA LINTON, GOVERNANCE AND CORPORATE PLANNING
MANAGER**

BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE