

CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY

MEETING OF: CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE: 8 DECEMBER 2021
REPORT OF: CHIEF FIRE OFFICER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE
AUTHOR: GRAEME WORRALL

SUBJECT: DRAFT 2022-2023 ANNUAL ACTION PLAN –
CONSULTATION INTERIM FEEDBACK

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with an update about the consultation on the draft 2022-2023 Annual Action Plan.

Recommended: that Members

Note the report.

Background

2. In September 2021, Members approved the draft 2022-2023 Annual Action Plan (the draft plan) and consultation process. The consultation on the draft plan started on Monday 4 October.
3. As with previous consultations, the process has three distinct strands: public consultation, staff consultation and consultation with local partners. Progress against each of these is outlined in the following paragraphs.

Information

Public Consultation

4. Due to Covid restrictions in place at external venues, it has not been possible to undertake the usual practice of engaging face-to-face with residents in high footfall venues such as supermarkets. Therefore, consultation activity has been focused online through the Service's website and social media. This is being supplemented with a postal survey.
5. The distribution of postal surveys took place week commencing 22 November 2021. This involved the delivery of 12,000 surveys across eight of the major population centres within Cheshire. This is expected to yield approximately 1,000 returns in total and this would represent an overall response rate similar to previous consultations.

6. 90 survey responses have been received to date, with the interim position below based on this feedback. The geographic split of responses received is proportionate to the population of Cheshire. The age profile is in line with previous consultations, though responses to-date are slightly weighted toward male respondents.

Staff Consultation

7. A programme of visits is now underway which involves senior managers visiting teams to discuss the draft plan and gather feedback. This activity is supported by information accessible on the homepage of the Service's intranet and an online survey.
8. At the time of writing, five survey responses had been received from members of staff.

Partner Consultation

9. Copies of the draft plan have been circulated to Cheshire Members of Parliament, unitary authorities and councillors, as well as town and parish councils and charter trustees across Cheshire. Individual briefings have taken place with key stakeholders in relation to the revised proposal for Wilmslow Fire Station. Neighbouring fire and rescue services and key public sector partner agencies have also been provided with a copy of the draft plan and encouraged to provide feedback.
10. Consultation documents have also been circulated to voluntary action bodies and community/faith groups across Cheshire to encourage feedback and distribute information to their respective memberships.

Interim Feedback

11. The following section provides an overview of the initial feedback received at the time of writing.
12. Overall, 90% of respondents valued Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service as a local service provider and 80% indicated their overall satisfaction with the performance of the service (a further 14% stated they were neither satisfied or dissatisfied). 66% of respondents considered that the Authority provides value for money (a further 21% neither agreed or disagreed).
13. As with previous consultations, this feedback continues to be influenced by public perception as 58% of respondents indicated they have had no contact with the Service in the past three years.
14. A significant majority of respondents (88%) identified as owner-occupiers. 98% of all respondents stated they had at least one working smoke alarm in

their property. However, 60% of respondents declared they had accidentally activated their alarm. The most common cause stated was due to cooking.

15. Regarding water safety prevention activity, comments received thus far indicate a preference for focusing efforts on young people through schools and swimming lessons and on ensuring visibility of fire staff during school holiday periods. Respondents highlighted the River Dee, River Weaver and also the River Bollin at Wilmslow as potential hotspot areas for people entering the water.
16. In relation to the revised proposal to introduce a Day Crewing duty system at Wilmslow Fire Station, 50% of respondents supported the proposal. A further 35% stated they neither supported nor opposed, while 7.5% opposed and 7.5% stated they did not know their opinion.
17. Regarding the proposed introduction of a cardiac response capability, 68% of respondents supported the proposal compared to 14% who opposed. A further 18% stated they neither supported nor opposed, or did not know. Narrative comments suggest that while the capability would be welcomed overall, there is a need to provide reassurance that staff are sufficiently trained and that fire cover would not be adversely affected.
18. 59% of respondents support the proposed 1.99% increase in the Authority's precept for 2022/2023, with a further 12% stating they neither support nor oppose the proposal. 26% of respondents to date have stated their opposition to increasing the precept. Some narrative comments recognise the need to provide funding to enable the provision of services that meet expectations. Other comments refer to the increasing cost of living and the need to maximise efficiency and reduce costs before increasing the precept.
19. Overall, 59% of respondents indicated their support for the overall package of proposals as laid out in the draft plan. 25% of responses stated they neither support nor oppose the proposals, while 13% stated their overall opposition.

Financial Implications

20. The use of a postal survey incurred additional costs of £5,502 due to external printing and survey distribution. This was funded through existing budgets.

Legal Implications

21. It is good practice to consult upon the draft plan and a specific questions has been asked about the council tax precept. The responses to the consultation will assist Members when they consider the report in February 2022.

Equality and Diversity Implications

22. None.

Environmental Implications

23. None

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: NONE