

EAST SUSSEX FIRE AUTHORITY

Date 23 April 2020

Title of Report East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service Integrated Risk Management Plan – Consultation and Communication Plan

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Background Papers Effectiveness, efficiency and people 2018/19 - East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service
<https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/fire-and-rescue-services/east-sussex/>
COVID-19 and Consultation: Institute advice - Issue 4
<https://www.consultationinstitute.org/covid-19/>
Fire and Rescue National Framework for England
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5904/nationalframework.pdf

Appendices Appendix A - Equality Impact Assessment – Consultation and Communication Plan (attached)

Appendix B CONFIDENTIAL - Financial Breakdown

Implications

CORPORATE RISK		LEGAL	x
ENVIRONMENTAL		POLICY	
FINANCIAL	x	POLITICAL	
HEALTH & SAFETY		OTHER (please specify)	
HUMAN RESOURCES		CORE BRIEF	
EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT – Appendix A			

PURPOSE OF REPORT To present the communication and consultation plan for the forthcoming Integrated Risk Management Plan, that has been revised in light of guidance issued by the Consultation Institute in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, for approval by the Fire Authority.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY The Service has a robust process for consultation and communication in relation to its Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) arrangements in order to provide stakeholders, the public and staff, clear and relevant information through all stages of the plans development. This process has been recognised as effective by Her Majesty's

Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services in its inspection report.

In light of the escalating COVID-19 situation, the original consultation and engagement plan to accompany the public consultation of the Service Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) has been revised, taking account of the latest guidance available. The Service has worked with its consultation provider and a number of alternative options to face to face communication have been considered in order to ensure we carry out an effective consultation process that does not necessitate face to face contact, or people leaving their homes.

The latest briefing note from the Consultation Institute contains guidance for local authorities and covers alternative dialogue methods and key issues to consider when assessing the risks to consultation plans. The guidance states that, *'consultations should continue as a general rule, however as these are extraordinary times, going ahead with a consultation may require major changes to existing plans'*.

The guidance continues that, postponement of consultation activities could be considered, but before postponing, consideration needs to be given to a number of areas. A gap analysis has been included so that the Fire Authority can see where the changes have been made against the guidance issued. As reported in the previous paper on the agenda, if the Authority were not to proceed to public consultation, this would result in a significant delay to the Service's ability to meet the potential financial challenges that lay ahead. There is significant uncertainty about our funding beyond 2020/21. The gap analysis has been provided in order to reassure the Fire Authority that the decision to proceed with the consultation is in accordance with the guidance issued and that the consultation and communication plan remains effective at this challenging time.

The major changes to the original plan include:

- A telephone survey to 600 residents that would normally prefer face to face communication.
- Replacing a 500 hard copy postal questionnaire with the telephone survey. In addition there will be a printable survey that can be returned hard copy or electronically with respondents being given the opportunity to phone their responses in, and counselled against returning them by post.
- Our provider will process responses online and via the telephone.
- Face to face focus groups have been replaced with online forums.

- A face to face stakeholder meeting had been replaced by an online forum.
- 10,000 post cards advertising the consultation and the plan will be targeted at those in our communities that typically struggle to use technology and whose internet usage is low. We will use communication channel preference information held within Mosaic Public Sector Segmentation data.

The need to revise the plan has resulted in a higher cost than previously anticipated. However, it is anticipated that we will yield a higher response rate from the methods we have chosen. The costs of the original consultation proposals were approximately £27,000. The addition of the telephone survey increases the costs to approximately £42,000. The Fire Authority has the option to include the 12 depth interviews with members of the public (to account for those who may not be able/wish to take part in the online focus groups). Which would bring the total to £45,000.

The Planning for a Safer Future IRMP and associated proposals will then be subject to an eight week public, stakeholder and staff consultation. The outcome of which will be brought back to the Fire Authority in September 2020 when Members will be asked to consider the results of the consultation exercise before agreeing the plan.

RECOMMENDATION

The Fire Authority is recommended to:

- approve the changes to the consultation plan in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, presented as option B;
 - approve the proposed 8 week consultation period;
 - consider whether to include a further 12 optional in depth surveys presented as option C; and
 - note that the additional cost will be funded from the corporate contingency.
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1 **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework for England states that each fire and rescue authority must produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP). The IRMP must identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect its community, including those of a cross-border, multi-authority and/or national nature. The Framework provides guidance on integrated risk management planning and that an IRMP should:

'Reflect effective consultation throughout its development and at all review stages with the community, its workforce and representative bodies, and partners'

- 1.4 The Service has a robust process for consultation and communication to provide stakeholders, the public and staff clear and relevant information through all stages of the plans development. This information is provided through a variety of channels, enabling service-users to understand how the Service matches resources to identified and changing risk. The Service has been recognised by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services as being strong in this area. The HMICFRS inspection report stated that, *'plans are informed by the views of a wide range of organisations and people. The service effectively consulted with members of the public while producing its last IRMP in 2017, gaining 588 formal responses to this consultation through roadshows and social media. The IRMP contained a commitment to engage with the public about response standards, which it did in 2018'*.
- 1.5 In light of the escalating COVID-19 situation, the UK Government has advised against all non-essential travel and contact for the foreseeable future. Moreover, the Market Research Society has recommended that face-to-face research is not undertaken at this time. Government guidance has also been sought together with legal advice and counsel from other Fire and Rescue Services who are also consulting on their integrated risk management proposals. The Service has worked with its consultation provider in order to revise the consultation and communication plan. A number of alternative options to face to face communication have been considered in order to ensure we can carry out effective consultation that does not necessitate face to face contact.
- 1.6 Over the last few weeks the Consultation Institute (tCI), a UK-based not-for-profit organisation that sets the standards for best practice in public engagement and consultation, has released a number of guidance notes for public services who are undertaking consultation activities. The guidance notes provide information on alternative solutions in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. A gap analysis has been included so that the Fire Authority can see where the changes have been made against the guidance issued. This is provided in order to reassure the Fire Authority that the consultation and communication plan remains effective at this challenging time.
- 1.7 This report sets out the Service's consultation and communication proposals which have now been revised in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic
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2 **MAIN ISSUES**

2.1 **Consultation Institute Advice and ESFRS response**

- 2.1.1 The latest briefing note from the Consultation Institute contains guidance for local authorities and covers alternative dialogue methods and key issues to consider when assessing the risks to consultation plans. The guidance states that consultations ***should continue as a general rule***, however as these are extraordinary times, going ahead with a consultation may require major changes to existing plans. The guidance continues that, postponement of consultation activities could be considered but before postponing, consideration needs to be given to the following areas.
- 2.1.2 **If the issue is not remotely time-sensitive and there may be advantage in switching resources to other matters.**
- 2.2.1 The launch of the IRMP and its proposals is considered to be a time-sensitive issue. As presented in the previous paper, it remains the recommendation of officers that the Authority continue with the planned public and stakeholder consultation despite the challenges faced as a result of the coronavirus situation.
- 2.2.2 If the Authority were not to proceed to public consultation, this would result in a significant delay to the Service's ability to meet the potential financial challenges that lay ahead. There is significant uncertainty about our funding beyond 2020/21. A delay would mean that the Service could not move forward with the changes it needs to make to improve community safety. The proposals as outlined in the plan represent significant and important change to how the Authority delivers services to our communities and these changes are needed to ensure that we are able to deliver the most effective service, based on risk, and within our available resources, and to deliver significant improvements across our service area. The introduction of a second fire engine into Bohemia Road, together with the reallocation of resources into prevention and protection work will improve the safety of our communities. It also means the Service can plan over the medium term to address its financial environment. As the fire authority is aware, the Medium Term Finance Plan models a series of scenarios (Best, Mid and Worse case) which produce a range of potential savings from £0.7m to £3.6m by 2024/25. Therefore the launch and progression of the IRMP is considered time-sensitive in order to ensure we are able to meet the financial envelope we are operating in.
- 2.2.3 Members will be aware of the Authority's legal obligations in relation to IRMP. The Fire & Rescue Services Act gives legal standing to the Government's National Framework document which requires all FRAs to produce an IRMP. Our current IRMP covers the period 2017 to 2020; there is therefore a strong legal case to progress with consultation with a view to the Authority being able to approve a final IRMP in the Autumn of this year. This requirement has not changed despite the coronavirus outbreak. Therefore this supports the recommendation to proceed as the production of the plan is time sensitive.

2.3. If key stakeholders would reasonably expect significant face-to-face dialogue and be reluctant or have difficulty in responding by alternative (e.g. online) methods.

2.3.1 The Service's usual consultation and communication plans utilise several methods which include face to face meetings, public focus groups, and social media campaigns and drop in sessions. The Service has considered the issue of face to face communications and what would be a suitable alternative at this time.

2.3.2 The revised consultation and communication plan now includes a telephone survey which will be targeted at those communities who prefer the face to face method of communication. The advantage of a telephone survey is that it can give us wide geographic access to our communities. Figures show that 85% of households have a landline and 95% of households have mobile phones. This survey will be undertaken with 600 people. This method alone will gain a response rate equivalent to previous consultations and is targeted at representative groups within our communities.

2.3.3 Participants are recruited in advance (methods of doing so differ according to the audience) and are asked to nominate a preferred date and time for an interview. A researcher then undertakes the discussion using a semi-structured topic guide that covers all the key topics, while allowing the interviewee a degree of freedom in their responses. Toward the end of the interview, respondents are given an email address in case they wish to send further information or comments using that route, or to answer any questions they did not wish to discuss over the telephone.

2.3.4 Six public focus groups were originally planned to allow for face to face communication and an in-depth discussions on the plans contained within the IRMP. These will continue but will now be held electronically. The focus groups will include 8 participants taking part in a text chat-based discussion via an online platform. They are arranged for a specific time and last around 1.5 hours. The participants are recruited in advance to match agreed criteria to ensure representative groups are included, and then sent invitations via email. They join the online focus group via their computer, smartphone or tablet at the designated time (without any costs to them, aside from any charges associated with data usage). A facilitator then runs through the discussion using a text chat facility whereby participants respond simultaneously to each question posed (their comments appear on-screen chronologically) and the moderator is able to follow-up on particular comments in the same way as they would at a face-to-face session.

2.3.5 Key advantages of these focus groups are:

- Participants can interact and “bounce” ideas and views off each other
- Enables a good geographic spread of participants
- Accessible to all of those with a telephone
- Can allow for explanations of background issues if stimulus material is provided
- Participants can take part at no cost to them

2.4 If key stakeholders fall into high-risk categories and would struggle to access alternative methods.

2.4.1 We have adapted the consultation plan to allow for people to respond to the survey by telephone as well as online. We will be sending out 10,000 targeted postcards with a phone number that people can ring in and provide their answers over the phone. The ability to phone responses back in is an additional change to what the Service normally provides. Normal communication channels will support this together with our media advertising. The analysts in the Planning and Intelligence team have a data base that profiles our community through preferred communication methods and channels. They are able to provide addresses by Mosaic Group profiles which provides information on at the channel preference of each group and we can target those in our communities who are adverse to digital communication as follows:

- Group F – adverse to digital and text, prefer post
- Group I – adverse to email and digital, much prefer post
- Group N – adverse to email and digital, prefer post / face to face
- Group O – adverse to digital, prefer post

This will allow us to highlight the consultation opportunities and provide them with the alternative options which include taking part by ringing in and leaving an answerphone message to arrange for a copy of the questionnaire to be emailed to them but the opportunity to post is there if needed. They can then ring the consultation provider who will take their answers over the telephone.

2.5 If alternative methods would struggle to reach seldom heard groups

2.5.1 We believe that the changes we are making will increase the reach to seldom heard groups. We will target groups utilising the Mosaic data base to ensure that we are reaching those groups, along with our existing data base that holds 500+ organisations. Those organisations will be targeted and asked to raise awareness of the consultation with their clients and staff offering them the range of opportunities to respond, i.e. on line or by telephone. They will also be given the opportunity to take part in a webinar. This was originally planned as a face to face focus group but the opportunity under the current circumstances now allows us to consult differently.

2.5.6 The webinar will conducted for stakeholders online in real-time at a predetermined time and date. There will be a presentation of the issues under consideration (with the ability to share slides), followed by a question and answer session. Those who have signed-up to take part can also be asked to submit questions in advance so answers can be prepared. The key advantages to this is that it provides an opportunity for many participants to take part easily and at no cost to them and allows for the explanation of complex issues. The Service's consultation provider suggests that up to 100 stakeholders could take part.

2.5.7 Key advantages of the webinar are as follows:

- Opportunity for many participants to take part easily and at no cost to them
- Offer participant anonymity
- Particularly good for specialist, targeted audiences
- Allow for the explanation of complex issues
- Content can be made available on demand for those unable to attend

2.6 If you face shortages of staff and resources such as would affect your ability to conduct a consultation to appropriate legal and other standards.

2.6.1 The staff supporting the preparations for the IRMP launch and consultation and communication plan are mainly professional services support staff. Operational staff involved in the COVID-19 response are not affected by the change in direction. Service staff, group managers and station managers were previously identified as delivery agents in the original communication plan ensuring their local partnerships and communities were briefed and aware of the proposals. This can still take place over online methods and electronic methods, pointing respondents to the online survey, telephone survey and the stakeholder webinars that will be taking place.

2.7 The Consultation Institute guidance states that public meetings and large scale events should be not be undertaken. It recognises that *'consultation traditionally makes use of many types of collective gatherings ranging from small-scale focus groups, committees, public meetings, forums, exhibitions, drop-in centres, citizens' juries or even citizens' assemblies. Their value in bringing people together to learn, share and deliberate is immense and cannot fully be replicated in other ways. However, all are inappropriate under current circumstances, and none should be undertaken.'*

2.8 The original consultation and communication plan contained a number of 'drop in' sessions across the area in Battle, Hastings, Eastbourne, Lewes, Newhaven, Brighton and Uckfield. The aim of the sessions were to publicise the plan and its proposals and encourage participation in consultation. They were going to be supported by staff where the public could talk about the proposals. We believe that that alternative proposal to conduct a telephone survey, targeted at our communities who are not online, is a suitable alternative solution to glean those views. A hard copy survey was handed out at these events. The Fire Authority are reminded that paper survey responses to our questionnaires are low and in recent year we have seen an increase in online responses.

The telephone survey will guarantee at least 600 responses. Previous consultation exercises have provided response rates as follows in their totality from online and hardcopy questionnaires:

- 675 from the review of our attendance standards
- 588 from the consultation on 2017/20 IRMP
- 655 from Changing the Service Shaping our Future
- 504 from the Hastings Review
- 347 from the rural review.

2.9 The guidance continues that *'It is not enough just to substitute a more traditional consultation with an online survey.'* Again the Service has responded to this statement by employing additional techniques to the original plan and included the telephone survey. The media will be utilised to ensure that our communities can access the information in the format appropriate to them. We will ensure copies of the plan are printed off and sent to the people who request one. We have also ensured the public can ring in to respond to the questionnaire by telephone. A robust internal resource plan will need to be implemented to ensure we can meet higher than expected demand for copies and telephone responses.

- 2.10 The guidance continues that organisations should ‘Go Digital’ and explore ‘*new facilities which their engagement/consultation systems can offer and which can, to an extent, bridge the gap caused by removing public events from your project plan. Use online forums, ideation tools, storytelling, text/video Q & A chats and publish your consultation papers imaginatively using multiple media such as podcasts, webinars, live-streaming and enhanced visual presentations such as infographics. Focus particularly on better presented documents that are easily accessible and downloadable.*’
- 2.11 The consultation and communication plan always allowed for the use of this technology. The website will be a powerful tool for communication and will include the link to the online survey. It will also host a range of publicity materials such as posters, leaflets and links to Fire Authority papers, etc. There will be a social media campaign using Facebook and Twitter and Facebook advertising to target members of the public who do not already follow our work. To support this the website will hold a series of short videos which will guide members of the public through the proposed 7 decisions held within the IRMP. The videos will be short (under 2 mins) with graphics and explanations as to why we are proposing to change.
- 2.12 The guidance continues that we must accommodate those who cannot respond using online technology. It states; ‘*You must not abandon those who are either reluctant or unable to participate electronically. There are alternatives. Telephone hotlines or similar services in particular, might prove useful in enabling you to gather consultation responses.*’ Our telephone survey will deliver this, along with the ability for our communities to telephone in their responses.

3 Pre engagement

- 3.1 In order to ensure the IRMP reflected effective consultation throughout its development a programme of pre-consultation and engagement activities have been held over the past 12 months in order to help shape the strategic direction of the IRMP and the proposals outlined within the draft IRMP 2020/2025.

3.2 Staff and Union engagement

- 3.2.1 Staff and representative body engagement has taken place and has contributed to shaping the proposals. Very early engagement was undertaken starting in October 2017 and was tied in with the HIMCFRS inspection communication plan. Every watch in the Service was visited. The main report and station profiles and the areas of investigation were shared with staff on a dedicated web page throughout the review and the opportunity for staff to feed back with questions and ideas was promoted. Station visits have been completed, focus groups were established and the proposals shared with staff and unions before being submitted to the Fire Authority as its next Integrated Risk Management Plan.

3.3 Pre engagement with the public

- 3.3.1 In order to carry out pre engagement on the integrated risk management plan a survey was available on the Service’s web site and advertised through social media. There were 100 respondents and the headline results are as follows:
- 80 % of respondents agreed that we should align our resources to the areas of highest risk

- 72% agreed we should invest more in more prevention schemes and campaigns such as our schools programmes, Safety in Action and Safe Drive Stay Alive
- 86% agreed we should invest more in improving business fire safety of buildings through, for example, inspections and advice for building owners
- 76% answered yes when asked if they thought the cost for a Band D property is £1.84 a week or £95.53 to pay for the fire and rescue service provided good value for money.

4 REVISED CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DUE TO COVID 19

- 4.1 The consultation period for the IRMP is set at eight weeks, commencing on Friday 24 April 2020 and closing on Friday 19 June 2020. The results of the consultation will be reported to the Fire Authority meeting on 3 September 2020.

Government Advice published in 2018 states:

- Consultations should be clear and concise
- Consultations should have a purpose
- Consultations should be informative
- Consultations are only part of a process of engagement
- Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
- Consultations should be targeted
- Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted
- Consultations should be agreed before publication
- Consultation should facilitate scrutiny
- Government responses to consultations should be published in a timely fashion
- Consultation exercises should not generally be launched during local or national election periods.

It is important to note that this guidance does not have legal force and is subject to statutory and other legal requirements.

- 4.2 With specific reference to the length of the consultation, it advises:

‘Judge the length of the consultation on the basis of legal advice and taking into account the nature and impact of the proposal. Consulting for too long will unnecessarily delay policy development. Consulting too quickly will not give enough time for consideration and will reduce the quality of responses.’

The Service had planned a combination of early engagement and consultation methods. This delivers a range of opportunities to provide information to all audiences, using multiple channels and various communication styles, allowing stakeholders sufficient time to provide a considered response within an eight-week consultation period. This will also allow the Fire Authority to consider the results of the consultation at its meeting in September. This timeline allows for the plan to be aligned with the budget proposals and included in the Authority’s Medium Term Financial Plan.

4.3 East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service has been running consultations for Integrated Risk Management Plans and Service Reviews for many years and has found the following trends in responses to be typical:

- Interested parties respond very quickly, sometimes using more than one method of communication
- Any media coverage is usually immediate and will raise the public's interest very quickly after information is released
- People who attend the focus groups, forums and staff meetings tend to respond straight afterwards once information has been received and discussed
- Once initial meetings and communications have been sent, reminders do elicit further interest but at a very much lower level than the first responses
- During the last 2 or 3 weeks of the consultation period there is very little interest and requests for information have usually died down completely
- Regardless of the timescale there will always be people who respond after the deadline resulting in their responses being too late to be included in the resulting report. This, however, is usually very low i.e. the Hastings Review received 3 responses after the consultation had closed

4.4 It is felt that our proposed combination of revised consultation methods, the telephone survey in particular will increase response levels and by utilising various communication styles, will allow stakeholders sufficient time to provide a considered response within an 8 week consultation period.

4.3 **Consultation methods**

4.3.1 The original consultation plan included face to face publicity and engagement events to reach the public. Additionally, the original plan highlighted a number of key influencers such as MPs and Chief Executives who we planned to brief face to face.

4.3.2 The consultation plan has been reviewed and guidance has been sought from the Service's consultation providers who have worked with us to develop the new plan. Also specific guidance has been sought from the Consultation Institute regarding postal surveys. Bearing in mind government guidance about people staying at home, we have ruled out a postal survey and put in place a telephone survey where people phone in. There is still an option for our communities to return a postal survey to us if they wish, but we will not be encouraging this. All the information will be available on the Service's website from Friday 24 April 2020 and staff, stakeholders and the public will all be informed of its location and the opportunities to respond and comment on the IRMP as soon as possible after that date.

4.3.3 The table below shows the original consultation plan with the revised plan so the Fire Authority can see at a glance where the major changes are occurring.

4.3.4 The major changes are:

- Replacing a 500 hard copy postal questionnaire with the telephone survey. In addition there will be a printable survey that can be returned hard copy or electronically with respondents being given the opportunity to phone their responses in, and counselled against returning them by post.
- Our provider will process responses online and via the telephone.

- A telephone survey to 600 residents that would normally prefer face to face communication.
- The face to face focus groups have been replaced with online forums
- The face to face stakeholder meeting had been replaced by an online forum
- 10,000 post cards advertising the survey will be targeted at those that typically struggle to use technology and whose internet usage is low.

4.4.4 There is a further option that the Fire Authority may wish to consider if it believes the above measures need to be supplemented. There is an option to include 12 in-depth interviews with members of the public (to account for those who may not be able/wish to take part in the on line forums). Video-based depth interviews are one-to-one discussions between a researcher and participant. They typically last from between 30 and 60 minutes, though they can be shorter or longer depending on the topic under discussion. Participants are recruited in advance (methods of doing so differ according to the audience) and are asked to nominate preferred a date and time for an interview. A researcher then undertakes the discussion using a semi-structured topic guide that covers all key topics, while allowing the interviewee a degree of freedom in their responses. This is presented as option C and will increase the cost of the consultation plan.

Original consultation plan A	Revised consultation plan B	Revised consultation plan C
Online questionnaire hosted by ORS (printed versions available on request).	As A	As A
Printable survey option to print 500, 800 or 1,000.	Changed to a PDF version of the questionnaire that can be sent out and emailed back, or communities can phone the consultation provider to respond. Postage return will not be encouraged.	As B
Staff presentations conducted face to face.	Staff presentations conducted on line via webinars and webex.	As B
A stakeholder forum conducted face to face.	A stakeholder webinar on line up to 100 participants.	As B
Six public focus groups conducted by consultation provider face to face.	Six public focus groups conducted by consultation provider on line.	As B
Six "drop in" events in where the public will be able to complete the survey with support from staff.	Telephone survey will now be undertaken to gain the views of 600 residents. A post card mail out of 10,000 linking to our website and our phone line to request an	In addition to option B there is an opportunity to include 12 in depth interviews with members of the public (to account for those who may not be able/wish to take part

	<p>electronic to be emailed or paper copy to be posted.</p> <p>Opportunity to phone in to leave their response.</p>	in the online focus groups). This is an option for the Fire Authority to consider.
Local meetings involving senior officers and community groups.	Email communications via stakeholder data base and local contacts on stations, offer of phone call briefings.	As B
Member involvement. We will provide leaflets and info packs to Members for use in surgeries and meetings and any interactions as appropriate.	These will now be electronic member packs for dissemination on line, via email etc.	As B

4.4 **Communication plan**

4.4.1 A co-ordinated communications campaign will support the consultation process and promote participation in the consultation.

4.4.2 There are a number of key objectives:

- To publicise the plan and its proposals
- To encourage participation in consultation
- To conduct a series of senior officer led engagements
- To set out next steps
- To help the public understand that we are facing new challenges

We will carefully monitor the number of responses and adjust our strategy accordingly.

4.4.3 The Service will make information readily available in a range of formats. As previously indicated by the Fire Authority, there is a preference for free or low-cost options which have a proven record of success.

4.4.4 The Service will therefore use digital channels, however it is important to note that internet usage drops from age 55 upwards according to Ofcom. This means the Service needs to support our digital communication with other forms of communication such as local media which broadly speaking will reach those not online. We will use stakeholder groups such as specialist charities to seek the views of those groups deemed to be harder to reach through the stakeholder data base and our usual methods.

Localised content

The Service will provide information which is tailored to local areas so the public can better understand the proposals and the rationale behind them.

The Service should anticipate that there will be some areas which will request a greater level of engagement.

Digital Communication

The website has a dedicated page www.esfrs.org/saferfuture which will be updated once the consultation is open with information about how people can take part including a link to the online survey. It will also host a range of publicity materials such as posters, leaflets and links to Fire Authority papers, etc.

A social media campaign will be launched using Facebook and Twitter. The Service will use Facebook advertising to target members of the public in key areas. Any questions will be answered promptly with people signposted to further information.

Media engagement

The media remains an important route to reaching a wide range of audience groups. The local media will be given with briefings, press releases and offered interviews with senior officers.

It is anticipated that there will be a higher demand for ongoing media responses and interviews during the consultation period and spokespeople will need to be available to respond to these as well as help launch the consultation.

There will be media monitoring in place to help assess common themes of concern or interest and these will be used to shape communications as the consultation progresses.

Stakeholder engagement

The Service holds a consultation database with over 500 contacts. This has been reviewed in recent weeks and additional contacts added. We will directly email a number of key stakeholders including, but not limited to, Councils including Parish Councils, charities and support groups and partners.

We will support on line engagement by Fire Authority Members and ESFRS staff by producing relevant material.

We would normally utilise libraries but will not be doing so during COVID-19.

- 4.4.5 The full communication plan has been developed and has been approved by SLT, the ORR review team will action the plan.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Best Value Duty applies to how 'authorities should work with voluntary and community groups and small businesses when facing difficult funding decisions. It states that authorities are to 'consider overall value, including economic, environmental and social value, when reviewing service provision'. To reach this balance, prior to choosing how to achieve the Best Value Duty, authorities remain 'under a Duty to Consult representatives of a wide range of local persons.

- 5.2 The Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework for England states that each fire and rescue authority must produce an IRMP. The IRMP must identify and assess all foreseeable fire and rescue related risks that could affect its community, including those of a cross-border, multi-authority and/or national nature. The National Framework provides clear guidance that an IRMP must reflect effective consultation with the community, workforce, representative bodies and partner organisations.

6 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The following table shows the costs associated with previous public consultation exercises. It also includes the costs of the original consultation proposals approximately £27,000. Option B with the inclusion of a telephone survey increases the costs to approximately £42,000. The Fire Authority has the option to include the 12 depth interviews with members of the public (to account for those who may not be able/wish to take part in the online focus groups). Which would bring the total to £45,000.
- 6.2 The Fire Authority is asked to note that the costs presented below have the potential to increase depending on the numbers of surveys received and processed. The consultation provider provides quotes based on an estimated number of returns, if the response to the consultation is high, the costs will increase. Also the provider is able to offer a translation service based on request which would be an additional cost and unknown. These costs are not factored in to the table.
- 6.3 A budget of £30,000 for IRMP consultation was provided in 2019/20 and remains unspent. Subject to the final outturn position it is expected that this amount can be carried forward into 2020/21. Any costs above this will need to be funded from the 2020/21 corporate contingency. The additional costs resulting from the impact of Covid 19 will be declared in the monthly monitoring return through NFCC and Home Office but it is felt unlikely that, in this case, this will result in additional Government funding.

Consultation	Cost* £'000	Response rate
Attendance standards	22	675
Consultation on 2017/20 IRMP	10	588
Changing the Service Shaping our Future	22	655
Hastings Review	19	504
Rural Review	30	347
Planning for a Safer Future		
Option A – original plan	27	**
Option B – with telephone survey	42	
Option C – with telephone survey and 12 additional interviews.	45	
*includes in house costs for the mail outs and social media advertising costs		
**costs could increase depending on the number of returns processed.		

7 EQUALITY AND DIVERISTY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Service has a Communication and Consultation Strategy that has an accompanying Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA has been considered as we have revised the consultation and communication strategy for this integrated risk management plan. There are no material changes from before. We have also undertaken a specific EIA on the proposals within this document which is attached as Appendix A. This has been reviewed by the Services Equality and Diversity Officer.