

Communications, Engagement and Consultation Strategy

2021-2024



East Sussex
Fire & Rescue Service



**EAST SUSSEX
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**

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Strategy Foreword

**By Roy Galley Chairman and Dawn Whittaker
Chief Fire Officer**

Effective communication, engagement and consultation is necessary for the success of any organisation but even more so for a public service.

Our last strategy set out a focus on key protection and prevention themes of home safety, business safety, road safety, water safety and health, and on continuous improvement.

This new strategy builds on the successes we have had and feeds in the learning from a wide range of activities and campaigns, including our Local Government Association co-funded behavioural insight Brighton Tribe campaign on reducing accidental dwelling fires – a national first.

It seeks to build on those foundations and enhance the way that we carry out these key functions across the whole of East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service and East Sussex Fire Authority.

The HMICFRS Public Perceptions survey allows us insight into how our communities view us and it is only right that we use this as a benchmark when it comes to improving our performance. On top of this we also aim to introduce new ways to ensure the voice of the public is heard when we plan our future.



It is so important for both the Fire Authority and the service to engage effectively with our diverse communities.

We plan to widen our community engagement, learning from our success with events such as Pride in Brighton, Hastings and Eastbourne, the White Ribbon campaign against domestic violence, International Women's Day, International Men's Day and many more.

Neurodiversity is one new area of focus, with the service working to increase understanding that brain differences are normal, rather than deficits. This concept can help reduce stigma around learning and thinking differences.

Language barriers and barriers in accessing information can lead to perceptions that service-providers do not care, do not listen or even are irrelevant to individuals. This is not true or acceptable. We want to leave the phrase "hard to reach" behind, recognising we need to further adapt our approach to communication and engagement.

Ultimately both the service and the community will benefit, with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds contributing language skills, new ways of thinking, new knowledge, and different experiences.



Strategic Context

Reform and continuous improvement

Fire and rescue services are operating under direction of the Home Office specifically under the direction of the national framework. There is a challenging reform agenda for the public sector environment and the future role of the service must be flexible, adaptive and responsive. With that in mind, fleet legislative changes, continued pressure to secure efficiency savings, along with dynamically improving practice in maintenance and quality standards mean that we need to remain open to change and ensure the practice of regular review is carried out.

As a service we are seeking continuous improvement, learning from historical actions and seeking opportunities to create efficiencies in our operation and working practices.

Firefighter and public safety

Providing the right equipment and fleet remains vital for the safety of our firefighters and the public. Reducing the occupational risks relating to contaminants is one example of where we can contribute to making our service a safer place to work. Seeking new and innovative firefighting technologies, whilst adopting national operational guidance.

Collaboration

With a legal duty to collaborate, the primary focus of East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service is to work in partnership with our communities and with others in the public, private and third sectors on prevention, protection and response to improve the safety and wellbeing of people throughout East Sussex and Brighton and Hove. As a public sector body we should continually seek to improve efficiency and provide best value.

HMICFRS

Regular inspections of fire and rescue services and the recently published 'State of Fire and Rescue – The Annual Assessment of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2020' confirm a continued emphasis on the operational service provided to the public, the efficiency of the service and the organisational effectiveness of the service.

www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/fire-and-rescue-services/how-we-inspect-fire-and-rescue-services/

Legislation

As with the Response and Resilience Strategy, legislation such as the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 give us a clear statutory mandate to respond to fires and other emergencies once alerted and to provide the necessary resources to deliver that response effectively. In complying with this legislation we will ensure that, regardless of the circumstances (e.g. time of day, weather conditions etc.) every member of our communities will receive access to an emergency response service.

The operation of a fleet of vehicles is a heavily regulated area and is affected by the following legislation or best practice guidance

- a. National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Recommended Best Practice for the Maintenance of Fire Service Vehicles.
- b. The Management of Occupational Road Risk.
- c. British and European Technical Standards.
- d. The Control of Pollution (Oil Storage) (England) Regulations 2001.
- e. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999.
- f. The Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1999.
- g. Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998.
- h. The Road Traffic Act 1991.
- i. The Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989.
- j. The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986.
- k. The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974.
- l. The Road Vehicles (Registration and Licensing) Regulations 1971.
- m. NFCC Transport Officers Group Security Guidance on Decommissioning and Disposal.

The list of Acts/Guidance is not exhaustive, and by the very nature of the fleet environment, various legislative requirements cut across other services of the Authority.

Purpose of the Strategy

The service’s purpose to make our communities safer cannot be effectively delivered without a strong and robust communications and engagement strategy which is owned and delivered across the whole of ESFRS.

The table below illustrates how this is achieved by supporting other strategies and corporate plans:

	Strategy/Plan
Delivering high performing services	Safer Communities Strategy Integrated Risk Management Plan IT Strategy
Educating our communities	Safer Communities Strategy
Developing a multi-skilled, safe and valued workforce	People Strategy Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy Estates Strategy
Making effective use of our resources	Integrated Risk Management Plan Medium Term Financial Plan Procurement Strategy Estates Strategy Collaboration Framework IT Strategy



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Approach to efficiency

Every aspect of what we do in the service has to be effective and efficient due to public money – communications, engagement and consultation are no exception.

Effective communication and engagement aims to result in a change in behaviour which benefits the community and East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service.

Successful public campaigns and education should drive down demand on the response element of our work, allowing resources to be re-allocated to other activities.

Similarly effective internal behavioural campaigns can assist in reducing undesirable behaviour which can be time-consuming to investigate.

By ensuring we are measuring effectiveness of campaigns and engagement, we will ensure how we are using public money effectively.



Environmental

We will:

- Ensure our commitment to environmental sustainability is clearly visible in all relevant communications and by making information on environmental policies and progress freely accessible to staff and the wider community to support positive behavioural change.
- Provide opportunities for the community to give feedback on environmental policies and progress; there should be a two-way communication as much as possible.
- Use different communication channels appropriately and creatively to demonstrate commitment to environmental issues, taking into account the environmental impact of those channels.

Sustainability

This strategy should encourage local action and decision making, improve the sense of community and take account of and/or empower underrepresented groups.

The delivery of this strategy relies on the continuing investment not only in the Communications team, but in other functions including People Services and Safer Communities.

The strategy has been built on the premise that no additional funding will be available and that we can dial up or dial down activity based on the core funding available.

Collaboration

The duty to collaborate with local and national partners is reflected within the strategy, recognising how important it is to align messages and support each other as we all seek to improve the delivery of our community engagement and education.

Areas of focus include engagement with partners on business as usual activity to make sure the public are informed and that key safety messages have a greater impact.

This strategy relies on increasing collaboration between organisations as illustrated in the Local Government Association peer review action plan.



Measuring success

As identified by the Local Government Association review, campaign evaluation needs to improve and this will form part of this strategy's action plan.

In addition, Key Performance Indicators (KPI) will be introduced for internal communication and public engagement.

We will use mechanisms such as the HMICFRS Public Perceptions Survey and our Staff Engagement Survey to measure these as well as collating information and feedback from channels such as the After the Incident Survey and post Business Safety Inspection survey, complaints and compliments.

Performance measurement, quality assurance and review

Performance of the strategy will be reported through the following main routes:

- Project based – for example the introduction of the Leadership and Behavioural Framework
- KPI reports and campaign evaluation reports to the Senior Leadership Team
- Business Plan reports
- Continuous improvement
- Quality assurance and improvement plans from peer review/community reviews

THEME 1 - Internal communications and engagement

Internal communications and engagement is everything that you think, feel and do with the organisation you work for, the people around you and the work that you do. Delivering good communications means that you have listened to your people, understood them and now they are sharing ideas and making positive change.

Leaders play a critical role during times of change, they need to create a line of sight and guide employees through what's ahead.

Internal communication is too important to be left to one individual or team, it is everyone's responsibility:

- We will review and enhance our internal communications framework, supporting the People strategy with its staff engagement and leadership themes.
- We will support the delivery of major change programmes in the service including the Integrated Risk Management Plan and HMICFRS inspections.
- We will identify and measure against Key Performance Indicators which demonstrate whether the service is effectively communicating with its staff, volunteers and Fire Authority members.
- We will provide support for leaders at all levels where required so they can deliver against expectations in the Leadership and Behavioural Framework.
- We will continue to invest in communication around the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy. We will focus on how we can improve the delivery of critical safety information, promote wellbeing champions and a positive health and safety culture, organisational wellbeing and our health and safety management systems

- We will embrace the “don’t tell me – show me” principle through the use of video, diagrams and other visual aids.
- We will continue to improve internal communications and engagement around the assurance of and learning from our response activity and prevention programmes.
- We will engage with and support staff networks to help with communications.

By the end of this strategy period we will be able to demonstrate progress against the KPIs set within individual projects or within the Communications team.

Our target audiences will report that they feel communications and engagement has been appropriate and effective.





Education Officer

Test your smoke alarms

IF THERE'S A FIRE
GET OUT, STAY OUT, CALL 999

www.esfrs.co.uk

THEME 2 - Quality engagement with the community

While there are almost as many definitions out there as there are people trying to define it, in its simplest terms community engagement seeks to better engage the community to achieve long-term and sustainable outcomes, processes, relationships, discourse, decision-making or implementation.

Community engagement employs a range of tools and strategies to ensure success. It also places a premium on fostering and enhancing trust as a critical element in long-term, sustainable engagement and effective governance.

Community engagement can be complex and labour-intensive and require dedicated resources such as time, funding and people with the necessary skills.

Building on success

We already deliver a wide range of public engagement through our thematic plans of fire / home safety, road, water and business safety. These activities underpin the directorate plan and prevention and protection strategy.

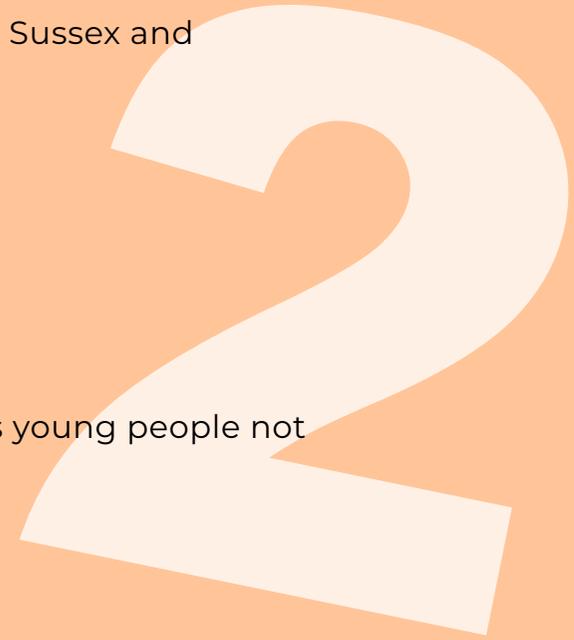
Examples include:

Safer Business Training – aimed at small and medium sized businesses within East Sussex and Brighton and Hove, the course provides information on:

- The Fire Safety Order
- Fire Risk Assessment
- Fire Prevention.

Station Open Days and community events.

Safe Drive Stay Alive – this seeks to provide an educational experience that teaches young people not only the dangers but also the consequences of poor and dangerous driving.



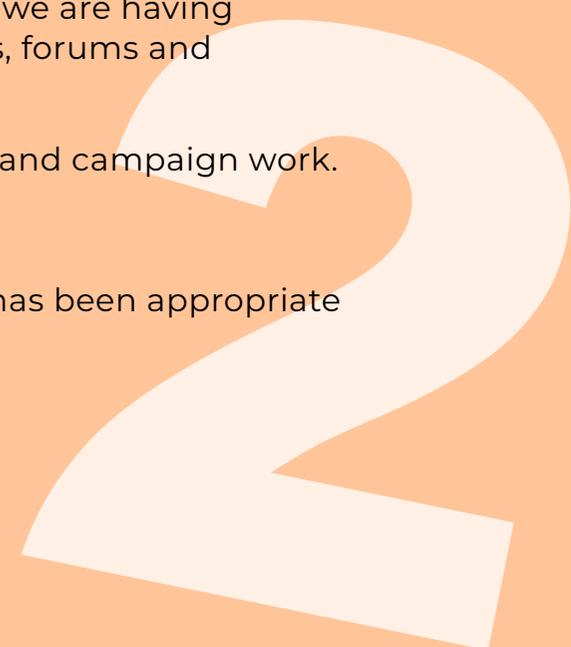
‘Safety in Action’ – these events encourage children to recognise hazards and take action to keep themselves and others safe:

- We will put in place a stronger framework for engagement with the community throughout each year, exploring the potential of citizen panels, town hall meetings and other routes for sharing ideas and feedback. This will cover a range of topics including gaining insight into the public’s understanding of our role and where they see we can add value.
- We will continue to promote Combined Fire Authority meetings among the public, encouraging more public questions and reporting back on outcomes.
- We will develop our post incident survey and post Business Safety Inspection feedback mechanisms.
- We will continue to ensure we effectively feedback the findings or consultations and other formal engagement, as set out above, developing ongoing relationships with new organisations.
- We will improve our evaluation processes to allow us to sense check whether we are having an impact through communication and engagement activities, using surveys, forums and assessments.
- We will engage with community groups to get feedback on our social media and campaign work.

We will have an improved relationship with a range of organisations.

Our target audiences will report that they feel communications and engagement has been appropriate and effective.

These will be demonstrable through our KPIs and evaluation processes.





THEME 3 - Inclusion and Diversity in communications and engagement

Inclusion and diversity is about our commitment to be inclusive, fair and equitable to all our colleagues, volunteers, communities and stakeholders. It is about listening and responding to all our diverse communities.

Inclusion and diversity for us is about people being central to our work. We recognise that if we integrate the principles of equality within communications and engagement, this will ultimately contribute to improving our outcomes for our communities and internal audiences.

- We will refine and improve targeting and accessibility of our agreed communications and engagement programme for prevention and protection activities.
- We will review our communications and equality guide and ensure it is launched and embedded within the service
- We will create new conversations to enhance the work of partners including the National Fire Chiefs Council, Fire Kills, Royal Life Saving Society, the Royal National Lifeboat Institute and Safer Sussex Roads. We will focus on ensuring that these are better targeted, more accessible and reflect the needs and cultures of our diverse communities.
- Communications, engagement and consultation activities will support the following aims from the People Strategy:
 - ▶ Take positive action to help encourage recruitment from underrepresented groups.
 - ▶ Using the benefits of diversity to better understand the communities we serve
 - ▶ Promoting cultures of dignity and respect with the public and within our workforce so that engagement may flourish, making us more flexible, innovative and create environments where people feel valued.



- Social media channels will better reflect our community and the way they wish to be engaged with

Our target audiences will report that they feel communications and engagement has been appropriate and effective.

These will be demonstrable through our KPIs and evaluation processes.



