

Communications, Engagement and Consultation Strategy

2021-2024



East Sussex
Fire & Rescue Service



**EAST SUSSEX
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE**

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Strategy Foreword

Roy Galley Chairman

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.



Dawn Whittaker Chief Fire Officer

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 are even 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

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, along with all other public sector organisations, faces an unprecedented period of change with a drive to deliver services to the public at a significantly lower cost. The need to deliver efficiencies whilst delivering better services and retaining a high level of staff motivation and performance means we are operating in a challenging environment.

This strategy focuses on our intended response to the challenges, risks and opportunities in terms of communications and consultation and outlines our broad commitments and planned actions in the coming years.

East Sussex Fire Authority is responsible for providing prevention, protection and response services to the communities of Brighton and Hove and East Sussex.

In September 2020 the Fire Authority approved a new Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) for the Service. An IRMP is a key planning document and describes how we will keep our residents, and those that work or travel through our area, safe over the coming years. It describes the main risks to our communities and how we are proposing to use our available resources efficiently to reduce those risks.

Key drivers and projects

These are our key drivers and projects behind our strategy.

Integrated Risk Management Plan delivery

The IRMP was approved by the Combined Fire Authority in June 2020 and a programme of work to implement the plan. It is one of the biggest change programmes the service has ever undertaken. This will require considerable communication and engagement with staff, Fire Authority members and the public.

Strategic Assessment of Risk and Station Profiles

Our Strategic Assessment of Risk helps us understand what we need to do as a service to keep our communities safe and is used to produce Community Fire Station Risk Profiles. It analyses and describes a wide array of information, how it can impact our Service and influences how we allocate and target resources for fire/home safety, business safety, road safety and water safety.

Successful communication and engagement is the foundation for this work, with community initiatives and effective evaluation.

Grenfell

With the public inquiry continuing and new legislation due in 2021, ESFRS resources are committed to delivering a wide ranging programme of changes relating to building safety. It is essential to have effective communication and engagement with staff, members of the public and the housing and building industries among others.

Our Building Risk Review programme will therefore be a priority.

HMICFRS and public survey

In 2019, HMICFRS commissioned BMG Research to undertake a study of the public's perceptions of local fire and rescue services across England. The study covers the public's views and experiences of local fire and rescue services' activities.

This highlighted the need to better explain the importance of the different roles played by the service in the community, including our prevention and protection work. The survey can be found here:

www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/publications/public-perceptions-of-fire-and-rescue-services-in-england-2019/

Our inspection report also highlighted a number of areas for us to focus on which are linked to communication, engagement and consultation:

- the way it prevents fires and other risks
- promoting the right values and culture
- getting the right people with the right skills
- managing performance and developing leaders
- ensuring fairness and promoting diversity.

National Fire Chiefs Council

Person-Centred approach for Home Fire Safety Visits

The NFCC believes that at the core of FRS prevention work is the explicit aim to reduce fire risk; to do this the individual or community must be at the centre of all that we do. The NFCC has endorsed a person-centred approach to prevention which encourages FRS to work in partnership with others to address the underlying causes of fire fatalities and injuries.

Equality of access

The NFCC have produced Equality of access documents to provide a range of information about different groups of people and ideas, and the actions which services could take to make a positive difference. These documents have been produced to support the NFCC plan to improve Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and support cultural change across the sector, promoting discussion, capturing learning and encouraging research locally and the sharing of good practice improvements across the sector.

Local Government Association peer review

In February 2020, the service invited a team from the Local Government Association to carry out a peer review of the communications function in the service. A number of the recommended actions have already been completed, with the following to be delivered in the lifetime of this strategy.

These include improvements around:

- Internal communications
- Campaigns
- Community Communications and Engagement
- Collaboration and efficiency.

Influencing behaviours and behavioural insights

The service has the opportunity to build on the success of previous behaviour change work, internally and externally. The use of behavioural insights is an established practice which requires investment of both time and other resources. It drives our understanding of risks and can positively influence cultures and behaviours internally and externally.

Financial constraints

As with all functions within Fire and Rescue Services, communications and engagement needs to be cost-effective with proven results. The Local Government Association review highlights the importance of campaign evaluation and collaboration. More than this, the service needs to demonstrate it is using the most cost-effective methods to reach the target audiences across all its communications, engagement and consultation activities.

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 Inspections 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.

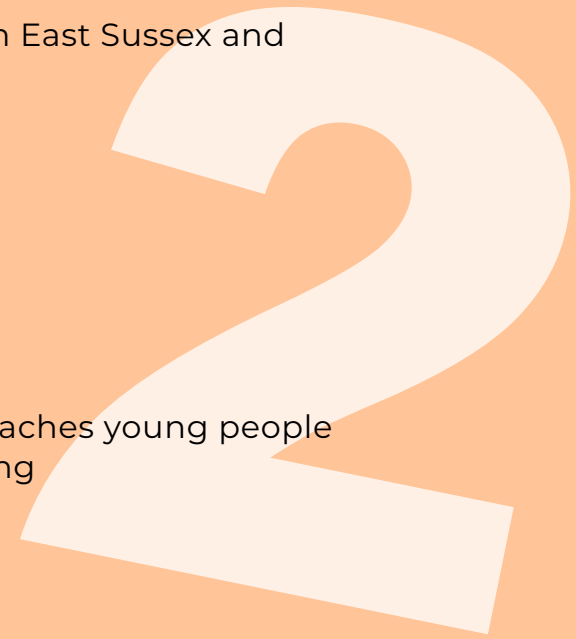
Community engagement can be complex and labour-intensive and require dedicated resources such as time, funding and people with the necessary skills.

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.



Three Year Action Plan

Priorities for year 1

What we will do	Key milestones including final completion	Who is involved	Performance targets/ success measures
Carry out internal communications review including research to establish how staff and members prefer to be communicated with	Survey Summer 2021 Implement Close down April 2022	Communications Training and Assurance Ops Planning and Policy	Staff survey Feedback
Deliver internal campaign on Leadership and Behavioural Framework and appraisals framework	Quarterly updates Close down May 2022	HR and OD Communications Training and Assurance	Staff survey Feedback
Increase staff engagement through staff survey/pulse surveys and staff networks	Rolling programme linked to service needs	HR and OD Communications	Number of responses Quality of information
Refine and improve targeting of our agreed communications and engagement programme for prevention and protection activities	Confirming programme of work Sept 2021 Annual programme of work from Jan 2022	Safer Communities Communications Analysts – Community Risk Inclusion and Diversity Adviser Local community groups	Evaluation reports
Support the People strategy: Take positive action to help encourage recruitment from underrepresented groups	Summer 2021 recruitment opens	HR and OD Communications Training and Assurance Inclusion and Diversity Adviser Local community groups	Recruitment stats Evaluation
We will support the delivery of the Integrated Risk Management Plan	As specified in project plan. Includes: Staff engagement Public engagement	IRMP Implementation Team Communications Local authorities	As specified in project plan
We will support the delivery of the HMICFRS inspection and findings	Rolling programme	SPOC for HMICFRS Communications	HMICFRS report findings

Roll out a new programme of media and communications training for station managers	Scoping Summer 2021 Autumn 2021 launch Completion Spring 2022	Communications	Feedback
Provide media training for Fire Authority members on fire and rescue service themes	Scoping Summer 2021 Autumn 2021 launch Completion Spring 2022	Communications Democratic Services	Feedback
Clarify out of hours arrangements in Communications to add more resilience, and explore opportunities for sharing responsibilities with partners	Scoping Winter 2021 Options report Jan 2022 Implementation by Spring 2022	Communications	System evaluated
We will continue to promote Combined Fire Authority meetings among the public, encouraging more public questions and reporting back on outcomes.	CFA meetings	Communications Democratic Services	Attendance numbers Numbers of questions
We will continue to ensure we effectively feedback the findings or consultations and other formal engagement, developing ongoing relationships with new organisations.	Timetable to be confirmed due to IRMP implementation	IRMP implementation team Communications	Number of participants Quality of information
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	Wellbeing calendar confirmed each year Channel development linked into Internal Communications Review	Health, Safety and Wellbeing team Wellbeing Group Communications	Readership numbers Staff survey

Priorities for year 2

What we will do	Key milestones including final completion	Who is involved	Performance targets/ success measures
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.	Scoping April 2022 Business case June 2022 Funding approval Sept 2022 Implementation by April 2023	Communications	Attendance Engagement levels
Develop better segmentation and benchmarking of internal communications, building on internal communications review. We will identify and measure against Key Performance Indicators which demonstrate whether the service is effectively communicating with its staff, volunteers and members.	Scoping April/May 2022 Decision August 2022 Implementation dependent on budget	Communications	Engagement levels
Review social media protocols/policies for stations' social media accounts. Ensure Communications have a good understanding of all the accounts that are being used under the ESFRS name, in order to be sure they are administered consistently and adhere to the organisation's policies and guidelines.	Deliver Spring 2022	Communications	Streamlined approach Greater oversight Control measures Co-ordination improved Increased social media engagement
Contribute to the creation of external resource group	From April 2022	HR and OD Communications Inclusion and Diversity Adviser	Engagement levels Attendance Influence on service work

Review the approach to Internal and Diversity and accessibility within engagement and communications We will review our communications and equality guide and ensure it is launched and embedded within the service	Winter 2022	Communications	External review Stakeholder feedback
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 and reflect the needs and cultures of our diverse communities.	Campaign calendar agreed each year	Communications Safer Communities	Campaign evaluation
Carry out audit of communications spending across ESFRS to review existing approach to commissioning campaigns	Summer 2022	Communications Finance	Report on spend able to highlight value for money
Refine and improve targeting of our agreed communications and engagement programme for prevention and protection activities.	Confirming programme of work Sept 2022 Annual programme of work from Jan 2023	Safer Communities Communications Analysts – Community Risk Inclusion and Diversity Adviser Local community groups	Evaluation
We will support the delivery of the Integrated Risk Management Plan.	As specified in project plan. Includes: Staff engagement Public engagement	IRMP Implementation Team Communications Local authorities	As specified in project plan

Priorities for year 3

What we will do	Key milestones including final completion	Who is involved	Performance targets/ success measures
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.	Programme rolled out from April 2023	Communications	Attendance Engagement levels
Refine and improve targeting of our agreed communications and engagement programme for prevention and protection activities.	Confirming programme of work Sept 2023 Annual programme of work from Jan 2024	Safer Communities Communications Analysts – Community Risk Inclusion and Diversity Adviser Local community groups	Evaluation
We will develop our post incident survey and post Business Safety Inspection feedback mechanisms.	Begin April 2023	Communications Business Services Safer Communities	Feedback from public
We will support the delivery of the Integrated Risk Management Plan.	As specified in project plan. Includes: Staff engagement Public engagement	IRMP Implementation Team Communications Local authorities	As specified in project plan
Provide enhanced media training for Fire Authority members on IRMP	Timescales to be confirmed – will be in line with 2024 IRMP	Communications Democratic Services	Feedback

