



AGENDA ITEM: 10

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

13th May 2013

CONSULTATION ON THE REVISED CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY IN WALES

**Report by Dawn Docx, Deputy Chief Fire Officer and
Colin Everett, Clerk to the Authority**

Purpose of Report

- 1 Members are invited to approve the Authority's response to the consultation paper on the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity in Wales (the Code). The response is attached at appendix 1 and the Code is attached at appendix 2.

Background

- 2 The Code provides guidance on the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity. Local authorities are required by legislation to have regard to the Code in coming to any decision on publicity, which is defined as any communication, in whatever form, addressed to the public at large or to a section of the public.
- 3 The Code is issued under powers conferred on the Secretary of State under section 4(1) of the Local Government Act. The existing Publicity Code was produced in 2001. Before issuing, revising or withdrawing a code, Section 4(4) of the Local Government Act 1986 requires that local authorities and their associations are consulted.

Information

- 4 The Code has been updated to reflect changes that have occurred since it was published in 2001. These changes principally involve updating the Code to refer to relevant statutory provisions, to exclude the publication of annual reports by elected members imposed by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011 from the operation of this code, and to add guidance in relation to filming and broadcasting council meetings. The revised Code applies to county and county borough councils, national park authorities, fire and rescue authorities and town and community councils in Wales.
- 5 Like the existing code, the revised Code gives recommended practice on a number of aspects of publicity covering subject matter, costs, content and style, dissemination, advertising, recruitment advertising, publicity about individual members of an authority, elections, referendums and petitions, and providing assistance to others with publicity.
- 6 The revised Code contains specific guidance on:
 - the publication of annual reports by elected members, however this is to be regarded as outside the scope of this Code as specific guidance will be issued separately in relation to the publication of annual reports;
 - the production of council newspapers; and
 - the broadcasting of council meetings.
- 7 The Authority's response indicates its support to the revised Code and in particular the consistency with other published guidance from Welsh Government. Other issues raised in the response are the cost implications of filming and broadcasting meetings, but also the cost benefit of using social media to promote fire safety messages and in recruitment campaigns.
- 8 Members are asked to approve the response attached at appendix 1.

RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE REVISED CODE OF RECOMMENDED PRACTICE ON LOCAL AUTHORITY PUBLICITY IN WALES

Do you agree with the proposed revisions to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority publicity in Wales?

We are content with the revisions to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority publicity in Wales. We welcome, in particular, the Code's consistency with other published guidance from the Welsh Government without duplicating that guidance e.g. on Improvement Planning, the Welsh Language and Equalities.

Are there any other issues you would like to raise in relation to these proposals, or more generally in this area?

Whilst paragraph 17 refers to the need to have regard to the Equality Act 2010 and the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011, it does not acknowledge the inevitable cost implications associated with ensuring that the Authority meets these requirements. Similarly having to introduce focus groups to seek opinion on how best to engage with those who share one or more of the protected characteristics will also impact on costs.

The Code encourages the use of Twitter and Facebook to communicate at meetings, however, it does not go so far as to say that local authorities may actually benefit from being more open and tweeting themselves from public meetings. A protocol on broadcasting and transmission from meetings has been developed jointly between the six local authorities across North Wales and North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority will be asked to adopt a similar protocol at its annual meeting.

Again, the Code encourages authorities to film and broadcast meetings but does not refer to the cost of achieving this at a time when authorities are trying to balance their budgets whilst having to make significant savings across the board.

Although the cost benefits of using internet-based material, for example, on websites, via email and tweeting from council meetings are mentioned in the Code, it does not appear to recognise the value of social media as a communications tool and the cost benefit that it can bring, for example, in raising awareness and also instead of traditional advertising. North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority has recently used social media during a large recruitment campaign which proved to be very successful.