



AGENDA ITEM: 8

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

20 July 2015

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION IN SUPPORT OF THE COMBINED IMPROVEMENT AND RISK REDUCTION PLAN 2016-17

Report by Ruth Simmons, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To review the Improvement and Risk Reduction Plan, 2015-16 public engagement and consultation strategy responses in order to inform the design of the 2016-17 strategy.

Background

- 2 North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority, as a Welsh Improvement Authority, is required under the Local Government Measure 2009 to:
 - Determine its own improvement objectives under any of the seven defined elements of improvement. Although required to set improvement objectives every year, this does not mean that the objectives have to change every year or be deliverable within one year.
 - Consult publicly on its objectives for a period of time. There is no set time for consultations, although most are about 12 weeks. Consultations should have a clear start and end date.

Information

- 3 To comply with the statutory guidance the Authority endorsed a public engagement and consultation strategy aimed at encouraging stakeholders to get involved in shaping the future of fire and rescue services in North Wales.
- 4 The purpose of the consultation strategy was to set out the means by which NWFRA members could obtain the views of the public on their draft objectives prior to choosing the best way forward for the future of fire and rescue services in North Wales.
- 5 The process was important in shaping those draft objectives before they were published in the Improvement and Risk Reduction Plan and to ensure that there was public faith in the decisions being made.
- 6 The strategy was informed by Participation Cymru National Principles of Public Engagement in Wales (2011) endorsed by the First Minister. These principles are:
 - engagement is effectively designed to make a difference
 - encourage and enable everyone affected to be involved, if they so choose
 - engagement is planned and delivered in a timely and appropriate way
 - work with relevant partner organisations
 - the information provided will be jargon free, appropriate and understandable
 - make it easier for people to take part
 - enable people to take part effectively
 - engagement is given the right resources and support to be effective
 - people are told the impact of their contribution
 - learn and share lessons to improve the process of engagement.

Evaluating the Engagement Process for 2015-16

- 7 The public consultation on the 2015-16 improvement objectives ran from October 2014 to January 2015.

- 8 A consultation document entitled 'Your Services, Your Choices' was produced to explain the Services financial situation and invited people to state their support for one of three possible funding options. People were able to do this by accessing a link to an electronic questionnaire hosted on a consultation hub.
- 9 The Service made people aware of the consultation in a number of different ways:
- the consultation document was published on the Authority's website and notification of its availability was sent electronically to 844 local and national stakeholders, including partner organisations.
 - social media was used to raise awareness of the consultation. The English messages reached 19,033 newsfeeds and were shared 173 times, and the Welsh messages reached 16,107 newsfeeds and were shared 46 times.
 - people also accessed the consultation questions on the consultation hub 553 times in the English version and 91 times in the Welsh version.
 - BBC news covered the consultation twice – once at the start of the consultation period and once near the end. Articles appeared in local daily and weekly newspapers during October and November.
 - face to face briefing sessions were provided for all six county councils in North Wales.
- 10 The consultation received a high number of responses when compared to previous years which had averaged 30 responses. The amended strategy resulted in 291 responses being received from a wide cross-section of people and included a balanced distribution of service employees and others.

- 11 The increase is attributed to the nature of the consultation content in addition to the diverse methodology used including the use of the on line hub and social media.
- 12 The strategy was measurable, in that each of the main communication channels had its own specific evaluation metrics. The target audiences were identified through stakeholder mapping encompassing, residents of North Wales, partner organisations, Welsh Government, local politicians, service personnel.

External Communications

- 13 All external communications were provided bilingually and in a range of formats for example, braille, telephone survey. Consideration was also given to the needs of all audiences and encompassed a variety of media including email/mailchimp, social media, service website and at community events.
- 14 Fire and Rescue Authority Members were requested to be proactive in encouraging engagement of stakeholders.

Internal Communications

- 15 Internal Communication were significant in supporting decisions made by NWFRA. Information to staff was provided in a choice of languages, English or Welsh by means of intranet, staff newsletter/magazine, Chief's update/briefing, internal briefings and station visits

Public Engagement and Consultation strategy design for 2016-17

- 16 Bearing in mind the relative success of the 2015-16 strategy it is recommended that those more successful elements be repeated this year but that we also seek to improve the flow of information to the public through more visually appealing communication.

- 17 Analysis indicates a correlation between the relative complexity of the key messages and the ease with which the public can participate in any engagement activity. Research indicates that public bodies including fire and rescue services have recently used short video clips on social media to convey consultation messages to increase participation and response rates.

Recommendations

- 18 That Members:
- (i) note the success of the 2015-16 public engagement and consultation strategy;
 - (ii) endorse the principle that the methodologies to be utilised for the 2016-17 strategy must seek to further increase or improve responses and to reflect the nature of the objectives once agreed by the Authority.