



AGENDA ITEM: 9

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

18 July 2016

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION IN SUPPORT OF THE DRAFT IMPROVEMENT AND WELLBEING OBJECTIVES 2017-18

Report by Ruth Simmons, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To review the responses to the Improvement and Risk Reduction Plan 2016-17 public engagement and consultation strategy in order to inform the design of the strategy for consulting on the draft Improvement and Wellbeing Objectives 2017-18.

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 for 2016-17 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 the Participation Cymru National Principles of Public Engagement in Wales (2011):
 - 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 2016-17

- 7 The public consultation on the 2016-17 improvement objectives ran from 24 September to 11 December 2015.
- 8 A consultation document entitled 'Your Services, Your Choices' was produced to explain the Services plans for the future and invited people to let us know their views on four key questions relating to 'How to maintain excellent, affordable Fire and Rescue Services in North Wales in 2016-17 and beyond'. People were able to do this by accessing a link to an electronic questionnaire hosted on a consultation hub.

The Service highlighted 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 the local and national stakeholders, including partner organisations, held on our database.
- Social media was used to raise awareness of the consultation. Facebook messages reached a total of 33,925 accounts (19,721 Welsh and 14,204 English) of which 500 clicked on the message to read more (211 Welsh and 289 English) and 196 clicked on 'like', 'comment' or 'share' (107 Welsh and 89 English)
- Twitter messages were seen by a total of 25,586 accounts (11,656 Welsh and 13,930 English) of which 210 accounts interacted with messages (29 Welsh and 181 English).
- A total of 180 people responded via the online questionnaire on the consultation hub (13.3% in Welsh and 86.7% in English). However in reality many respondents dropped out part way through the process so the response rate was closer to 150 people.
- The majority of those who responded in this way were aged 45-54 (26.4%) and 25-34 (20.7%), with 57% of respondent's male and 36.4% female.
- A bilingual video was produced to explain and illustrate the consultation in a more easy to understand way, supporting the more in depth consultation document. This achieved 246 views (57 in welsh and 189 in English).

- Articles on the consultation appeared in local daily and weekly newspapers and online versions of publications during October and November as well as coverage by BBC news (broadcast and online).
- Face to face briefing sessions were provided for all the county councils in North Wales that requested one.
- In addition to the online questionnaire, nine written responses were received by email and post.
- Fire and Rescue Authority Members were requested to be proactive in encouraging engagement of stakeholders.
- 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 – where the video was found to be particularly effective.

9 The consultation received a relatively high number of responses when compared to earlier years which had averaged 30 responses, although not as many responses as last year (291 responses). Responses were received from a wide cross-section of people and included a balanced distribution of service employees and others.

10 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.

Public Engagement and Consultation strategy design for 2017-18

11 The strategy recommended for 2017-18 is based on adopting the more successful elements of the 2016-17 strategy but bearing in mind the four draft improvement objectives which now includes a new objective for the medium term budget in relation a proposed reduction in services in the future.

- 12 The strategy recommended therefore focuses on the following:
- to conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify who to engage with and adopt appropriate means of engaging with those identified
 - to adopt a variety of means and ways of communication that will give people a choice of how they would like to participate and feedback their views
 - to avoid language which is difficult to understand, keeping information short and simple, avoiding over-complication.
- 13 The strategy will involve quantitative engagement via an online questionnaire on the consultation hub which is signposted via the Service website and social media. Paper copies will be made available in prime public locations. A simple bilingual video intended for a broad audience will be produced to help explain the issues associated with the draft objectives.
- 14 Qualitative engagement will be encouraged via face to face engagement at council meetings and the introduction of a consultation panel, utilising existing panels within the service region and developing an online panel via the Service website. An existing database of people wishing to receive information on Service activities will be utilised. NWFRS' own consultation panel will be further enhanced over future years.
- 15 The approach reflects the fact that the Improvement Objectives for 2017-18 are part of a wider four year strategy, with some of the proposals not expected to come into effect for a number of years. There will be further opportunity therefore to consult widely in the coming years.
- 16 The use of social media will be extended to include signposting to the online questionnaire and to focus on particular objectives over specific periods, prompting a direct response from existing Service Facebook fans and Twitter followers.

- 17 The various strands of the strategy will be fully evaluated and the analysed results presented to the Authority to help inform a decision on the draft improvement and wellbeing objectives.

Recommendations

18 That Members:

- (i) note the success of the 2016-17 public engagement and consultation strategy;
- (ii) endorse the consultation strategy for the draft 2017-18 improvement and wellbeing objectives.