

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

18 FEBRUARY 2013

1. **OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE DRAFT COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY**

Joint report of the Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDED

- 1.1 THAT the Authority note the outcome of public consultation on the draft Community Safety Strategy and the responses to the consultation questions (Appendix 1).
- 1.2 THAT the Authority consider and review the analysis of the outcome of consultation and its impact on the draft Community Safety Strategy.
- 1.3 THAT the Authority approve the proposed amendments made to the Community Safety Strategy which is still in draft form to be highlighted further at the meeting (full document with highlighted amendments is attached at Appendix 2).

2. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

This report is submitted to update Members on the outcome of public consultation on the draft Community Safety Strategy which took place between 19 November 2012 and 4 January 2013. Members are asked to consider the outcome of the public consultation, the responses to the consultation questions and the impact this has on the draft strategy document. The Community Safety Strategy forms part of a suite of planning documents to be hyperlinked from the Strategic Plan ("The Plan") which is being developed in parallel.

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The National Framework Document (NFD) outlines the Authority's requirement to produce an integrated risk management plan (IRMP) covering a 3 year period to demonstrate how it will discharge its responsibilities in a way that is open and transparent to its community and others with an interest. Importantly, the Authority is required to demonstrate through effective and meaningful consultation how its plans have been developed.
- 3.2 The Authority's IRMP is called the Community Safety Strategy. A draft version of this document, approach to consultation and the questions were discussed and agreed with the Chair of the Authority at a meeting held with him on 12 November 2012. Authority members were subsequently emailed with all information on the same day as well as having the opportunity to provide further input at the Policy and Planning Forum on 10 December 2012. Members received a presentation on the emerging findings from the consultation at the Policy and Planning Forum held on 7 January 2013. A further update was also provided at the Policy and Planning Forum meeting of 21 January 2013.
- 3.3 Consultation with staff and their representatives was initiated at a Management Briefing held on 15 November 2012 with further opportunities to provide feedback at a Leadership Forum held on 6 December 2012. The Trade Unions were further invited to comment on the draft Strategy on 11 December 2012. The consultation documents were placed on the internet and intranet sites on 19 November 2012 making them widely available.
- 3.4 Officers have not received a response to the consultation on the content of the Community Safety Strategy from the Trade Unions.
- 3.5 Executive Committee approved the Key Priorities, Strategic Objectives and Outcomes to be included in 'The Plan' 2013-2016, on 10 December 2012. A paper containing information about further developments of "The Plan" is being submitted under separate cover. The Community Safety Strategy and "The Plan" will be aligned to, provide clarity about how risk based information has been used to inform planned activity.

Consultation Outcomes

- 3.6 Details of the consultation methodology and responses received are included in Appendix 1.
- 3.7 A total of 2,291 responses were received. The overall nature of these responses was in favour of the proposals outlined within the draft Community Safety Strategy.
- 3.8 Some amendments have been made to the draft document, to describe and reflect the outcomes of the consultation process. However there are no significant changes to the content of the Community Safety Strategy proposed as a result of this exercise.
- 3.9 The Community Safety Strategy is still in draft form as there may be a need to further refine this depending on developments on the financial position. A final version of the document will be submitted for approval in April 2013.

4. **EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

In preparing this report an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is required and has been completed. The EIA will be considered further before the final document is submitted for approval. The EIA did not raise any significant issues to be brought to the attention of Members.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There is a legal and statutory duty for the Authority to produce an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) that reflects meaningful consultation as outlined in the National Framework Document. The Community Safety Strategy provides an analysis of risk based information and approaches being taken and how this will be used in developing the plans for delivering services.

6. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications as consultation was promoted on line. The delivery of proposals and approaches outlined in the Community Safety Strategy will be subject to the finalised budget position.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

National Framework Document
Executive Committee Paper 10 December 2012

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**WEST MIDLANDS FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY COMMUNITY SAFETY
STRATEGY 2013/16**

PUBLIC CONSULTATION EXERCISE

REPORT ON ANALYSIS OF RESPONSES RECEIVED

Introduction

Following the creation of a draft Community Safety Strategy during late 2012 (to fulfil the requirements of the Fire and Rescue National Framework to produce a publicly available Integrated Risk Management Plan covering a 3 year period) the draft document was released for public consideration and feedback.

The consultation process was designed to capture feedback from a range of sources, including:

- local communities and the public in general
- members of the Fire and Rescue Authority and other elected representatives
- employees
- representative bodies
- relevant partner agencies
- neighbouring FRAs

The consultation period ran from 19th November 2012 until 4th January 2013.

Consultation began with a management briefing on 15th November and relied heavily on electronic media, and the website in particular, to reach the wider target audience.

The central theme of the consultation was to invite comment and feedback on the draft Community Safety Strategy (IRMP) in general, but to provide a degree of structure to the process, respondents were invited to answer a number of specific questions relating to key issues outlined and described in the document.

Respondents were also given opportunity to return comments on the issues raised, or more generally on their satisfaction with the services provided.

The questions included within the exercise are listed below:

Consultation Questions

- 1a We have established a risk based approach to managing our emergency response activity and the distribution of our fleet of response vehicles and firefighters. **Do you agree that this is the best way to deploy our firefighters and emergency response resources, so that the incidents with the greatest potential to cause harm to people are given top priority?**
- 1b **Should we continue to set a target of 5 minutes, for our attendance at high risk incidents such as house fires and road traffic collisions?**
- 2 We need to continue to deploy our staff into people's homes, schools and other places where we can exert a positive influence on behaviours and avoid an increase in numbers of fires and accidents. **Do you agree that we should continue our efforts to educate and inform people and control risk in this way?**
- 3 The number of road traffic collisions (RTCs) that we attend has increased and continues to rise. We have a legal duty to respond to these incidents but not necessarily to undertake prevention work to reduce the number of RTCs. We intend to take steps to reduce the number of RTCs and the injuries they cause. **Do you agree that we need to increase our efforts to prevent RTCs and to take a leading role in doing so?**
- 4 To refine our emergency response service, we have launched a range of different vehicles, sometimes sending fewer firefighters to low risk calls, based on information obtained from the caller. **Do you agree that we should continue to develop more flexible response options in this way?**
- 5a The number of responses we make to calls originating from automatic fire alarms has decreased because we are able to challenge these calls, to ensure we only turn out to a genuine emergency. **Do you agree that we should continue to challenge calls in this way, to reduce the number of attendances to non-emergency incidents?**
- 5b **Do you support our policy of challenging non-urgent Special Service Calls and on occasion, charging for our services?**
- 6a **Has your perception of West Midlands Fire Service changed as a result of reading this Community Safety Strategy?**
- 6b **If so, how?**
- 6c **What do you think we could do better, or differently?**

- 7 The services we provide currently cost the average Council Tax band 'D' payer £47.83 per annum, which is less than £1 per week. This compares with an average across the UK of £64.12 per annum.

Do you think this represents good value for money?

Results

The total number of responses received, up to 11th January was 2,291, comprising the following mix of electronic and paper format:

Electronic responses (via Website, www.wmfs.net) 354

Paper copies 1,937

Given that the population of West Midlands is currently around 2,000,000 (over 16 years of age), this equates to a response rate of 0.11%.

Analysis of Responses

To gain an insight into the views generated in response to the draft Community Safety Strategy, it is useful to examine the nature of the responses to each question posed in the questionnaire.

Most of the questions began with a simple choice of either 'yes' or 'no' and all questions gave respondents the opportunity to make comments.

The comments received have been summarised as far as possible into manageable categories and are described below, for each question (a number of comments were inappropriate and have not been included).

Question 1a

We have established a risk based approach to managing our emergency response activity and the distribution of our fleet of response vehicles and firefighters. **Do you agree that this is the best way to deploy our firefighters and emergency response resources, so that the incidents with the greatest potential to cause harm to people are given top priority?**

In total	1,846 or 80.58%	responded YES
	342 or 14.93%	responded NO

Question 1b

Should we continue to set a target of 5 minutes, for our attendance at high risk incidents such as house fires and road traffic collisions?

2,042 or 89.13%	responded YES
206 or 8.99%	responded NO

With regard to questions 1a and 1b, the most frequent comment (82) was that respondents felt we should attend in less than 5 minutes. A further 51 stated that we should attend as fast as possible. 30 people thought we should always respond in the same way, with another 26 holding the view that there should be no target, just a fast response.

54 comments were positive about the changes being referred to and the policies described and 13 people specifically referred to the importance of risk analysis in managing our response resources. Another 13 responses were generally positive about WMFS and the services provided.

A popular response (49) urged WMFS to ensure we respond with a fully equipped fire engine, with sufficient crew members and no reduction in staff.

The total number of comments made to questions 1a and 1b was 364.

Question 2

We need to continue to deploy our staff into people's homes, schools and other places where we can exert a positive influence on behaviours and avoid an increase in numbers of fires and accidents. **Do you agree that we should continue our efforts to educate and inform people and control risk in this way?**

2,115 or 92.32%	responded YES
165 or 7.20%	responded NO

The favoured comment to this question was an affirmation in some way, that we should continue our work in prevention activities, with a total of 127.

43 people felt that education was important, but not as essential as the response service, or that it should be kept in proportion, so as not to detract from response in any way.

28 comments were specifically positive about young person or schools education.

26 respondents felt that we should no longer continue with education/prevention, with references to the economy and budgets being restricted.

15 people supported prevention, but felt that it should be provided more by partners or other agencies.

In total, there were 285 comments made in response to question 2.

Question 3

The number of road traffic collisions (RTCs) that we attend has increased and continues to rise. We have a legal duty to respond to these incidents but not necessarily to undertake prevention work to reduce the number of RTCs. We intend to take steps to reduce the number of RTCs and the injuries they cause.

Do you agree that we need to increase our efforts to prevent RTCs and to take a leading role in doing so?

1,792 or 78.22% responded YES
447 or 19.51% responded NO

Despite the strong support for this approach shown in the YES/NO responses, the majority of the comments received (124) did not agree that WMFS should lead in RTC prevention, and stated that this is the work of other agencies.

A further 25 said that we should not be doing this work if the finances are not available currently to support it.

70 people responded with positive comments about our lead in road safety. 53 responses were positive, but felt that the Police or others should be more involved and another 18 were positive, but felt that other work is of a higher priority.

In total 331 comments were made in response to question 3.

Question 4

To refine our emergency response service, we have launched a range of different vehicles, sometimes sending fewer firefighters to low risk calls, based on information obtained from the caller. **Do you agree that we should continue to develop more flexible response options in this way?**

1,534 or 66.96% responded YES
696 or 30.38% responded NO

The most frequent comment at 150, was that we should keep fire engines, stop the introduction of BRVs, or treat all incidents in the same way.

84 people commented positively to the question, supporting a flexible response option, with a further 48 saying yes, as long as there are still sufficient fire engines and people are not to be put at risk.

29 people felt that BRVs should not be sent to high risk incidents and 44 people were concerned that the information obtained from callers reporting an emergency incident was insufficient or unreliable.

Question 5a

The number of responses we make to calls originating from automatic fire alarms has decreased because we are able to challenge these calls, to ensure we only turn out to a genuine emergency. **Do you agree that we should continue to challenge calls in this way, to reduce the number of attendances to non-emergency incidents?**

1,918 or 83.72% responded YES
313 or 13.66% responded NO

Question 5b

Do you support our policy of challenging non-urgent Special Service Calls and on occasion, charging for our services?

1,628 or 71.06%	responded YES
574 or 25.05%	responded NO

The favoured comment (111) to these questions, despite the strong support in the YES/NO section, was that there should be no charges made as people already pay for the service.

84 people commented that we should charge and 62 people commented with positive statements about call challenge.

42 comments were supportive of charging, but only if done with an awareness of vulnerability of the elderly, etc, or for certain types of incident.

31 people felt that call challenge was not safe because of insufficient detail or reliability of information given by caller and a further 23 supported call challenge, but with a cautious approach.

13 people felt that we should charge persistent offenders only.

In total, there were 428 comments received for questions 5a and 5b.

Question 6a

Has your perception of West Midlands Fire Service changed as a result of reading this Community Safety Strategy?

Q 6b If so, how?

736 or 32.13%	responded YES
1,295 or 56.53%	responded NO

89 respondents stated that after reading the document, or the summary, they have a better understanding of WMFS and the services provided; or their understanding of the service has improved.

A further 55 responses were positive in general about the changes being made or proposed for the future.

70 comments were negative concerning the service or the proposals and another 27 were along the lines that policy changes are being driven by financial considerations.

14 comments stated that there was insufficient detail, or were otherwise negative about the consultation process, whilst 12 people stated that their views had not been altered.

There were 311 comments in response to question 6a and 6b in total.

Question 6c

What do you think we could do better, or differently?

This question generated 365 comments in total.

61 comments were general, positive statements regarding WMFS whilst a further 59 were unsure how we could improve, or did not know how.

52 people asked for better communication, or more attention to listening to concerns, or greater honesty or integrity.

40 responses were in support of protecting emergency response staff and resources, whilst a further 23 asked for greater emphasis on response and less on education or prevention.

21 asked for continued involvement in community safety and education, and 23 urged us to continue to lobby government for improved funding support or try to avoid more financial cuts.

11 comments were negative in relation to BRVs.

There was a wide range of individual responses on particular issues, ranging from BRVs, call challenge, charging for calls and fast response times, to issues such as station locations, collaborative working or staff training.

Question 7

The services we provide currently cost the average Council Tax band 'D' payer £47.83 per annum, which is less than £1 per week. This compares with an average across the UK of £64.12 per annum.

Do you think this represents good value for money?

1,985 or 86.64%	responded YES
189 or 8.25%	responded NO

The majority of comments in this area were positive, with 59 people making positive comments of a general nature and a further 30 believing that services provided good value for money.

29 people said that they would pay more Council Tax to uphold the service.

33 people took the opportunity to oppose cuts to front line services or to offer concerns about BRVs and other changes.

21 people shared their concerns about government funding of services and 11 people felt that would not want to pay more for the service or that the service was expensive.

The total number of comments here was 265.

Summary

Although the level of response from the community was limited, the responses received were very supportive of the service and its current and proposed policies, for the main part.

Positive and negative responses have been summarised in the following table.

Question	Nature of response	
	+ve	-ve
1a	81%	15%
1b	89%	9%
2	92%	7%
3	78%	20%
4	67%	30%
5a	84%	14%
5b	71%	25%
6a/b/c	N/A	
7	87%	8%

Percentage figures will not add up to 100% in the rows above as not all respondents answered every question.

Conclusion

The above report has attempted to summarise the feedback received from the consultation exercise on the WMFS draft Community Safety Strategy 2013-16, serving the purpose of our Integrated Risk Management Plan.

The summary shows that the majority of responses were positive or supportive in nature, but we also acknowledge that numbers of comments and responses voiced concerns about the nature of changes being made to services provided, especially with regard to the impact of financial cuts. All comments were noted and recorded.

G/Cdr Rory Campbell – January 2013

Consultation Methodology

Consultation was predominantly an online process supported by other mediums such as phone, email and paper copies. Online consultation is the most cost effective method when the reach of this approach is considered.

This consultation process was promoted using our website and social media along with press across the West Midlands. Operational staff also played a huge part in promoting this process as part of their day to day work. Reminders and prompts were released during the consultation period to encourage people to take part.

Consultation ran from 19th November 2012 until 4th January 2013. In line with 'Cabinet Office Consultation Principles' the length of time taken for this consultation was considered appropriate.

A wide range of activities were carried out on a local level, examples of which are at the end of this document.

Responses/Results

Paper copies received = 1937

Electronic submissions = 354

Email submissions = 0

Voicemail message = 0

Out of all the responses received 115 people want to be part of any future consultation processes.

The number of responses equates to 0.11 percentage of the population, (which currently stands at 2,000,000 over 16 year olds), which compares to the previous consultation responses figures of 0.0717 in 2010.

No response have been received from the Trade Unions

Electronic Responses – break down by week

Week – Period	Responses	%
19/11/2012 – 25/11/2012	121	31
26/11/2012 – 2/12/2012	111	28.5
31/12/2012 – 9/12/2012	47	12
10/12/2012 – 16/12/2012	27	7
17/12/2012 – 23/12/2012	26	7
24/12/2012 – 30/12/2012	15	4
31/12/2012 – 4/1/2013	41	10.5

Initial promotion aided the large number of responses in the early weeks; we had an expected slow down around the Christmas break which increased again towards the close of consultation

Lessons Learnt

Overall the response levels were low but this was expected as a consequence of the generic and none specific nature of the questions being asked. The quality and quantity of comments from online responses greatly outweighed the paper responses. Therefore if future consultations requires 'yes' and 'no' answers, localised paper copies would be a suggested way forward, whereas any qualitative feedback is best carried out through an online format (or other formats such as focus groups).

In future consideration needs to be given as to how station personal can download the entire online consultation onto CD/Memory stick where possible (current format does not allow for results to be recorded).

The consultation was made available to all communities of the West Midlands.

A lot of comments were made regarding the questions perceived to be too leading. A more balanced argument would be welcomed in the future.

Examples of community engagement carried out by operational crews

Public engagement sessions in shopping centres, town centres and supermarkets

Face to face contact with shops and businesses in local areas

Via Community Partnership databases

Presentations at Local ward forums, Councillor Forums, Community Safety Scrutiny Board, PACT meetings, LDG agendas and district committees, partnership meetings,

HSCs/hot strikes, OAP homes, cycle teams and community engagement such as electric blanket testing

Via Councils Websites

Letters directly to Councillor's and MPs

Engaged with all community groups who use station community rooms

Use of restricted duties personnel to visit appropriate organisations and premises

Local Councillors contacted and encouraged to distribute information via their own contact lists

Posters and flyers distributed to some primary and secondary schools

Web link shared with all contacts of LALO/Advocate/Youth Officer – incl. 3rd sector

Local press/media utilised to publicise events

Advocates engaging with local community groups

Working in partnership with our vulnerable groups – i.e. age concern utilised the link and presentations at their meetings – SILC/SOLO – paper forms utilised and forwarded to advocate

Posters advertising consultation and distributed to shops, libraries, doctors surgeries, Council House, Community Centres, etc.

Promoted with ALL partner agencies for links from their websites

Prince's Trust members and YFA groups asked to assist promotion of the consultation

DRAFT – Community Safety Strategy 2013/2016

This document sets out our analysis of foreseeable, fire and rescue- related risk in the West Midlands. It describes the work we are already engaged in to make West Midlands safer, and it identifies new initiatives, changing priorities and some changes of direction that we believe are necessary and appropriate to deliver the most effective services over the next three years. It serves the purpose of our Integrated Risk Management Plan.

Our past performance has been to a very high standard, but we want to continue to improve. We have achieved great successes in reducing the number and impact of fires across our area, in a sustained effort to drive down the suffering and loss caused by fire in local communities.

We intend to continue the drive to focus our work on public education and engaging with partner services, to target the delivery of advice and guidance in the areas of prevention and protection.

We have already experienced significant cuts to our budget and we know that there will be more serious funding reductions in the future.

Although our strategic direction and our priorities are driven by knowledge of our local communities and intelligence describing our performance in risk control and reduction, in reality, our plans for the future also have to acknowledge the spending restrictions that all public services are having to operate within.

Approximately one third of our budget comes from council tax and two thirds comes from centrally funded National Fire Service Formula Grant. The Comprehensive Spending Review (2011-2015) set out a 25% reduction in the National Fire Service Formula Grant. The cash reductions received nationally for the first two years of the settlement 2011/12 and 2012/13 equated to approximately 6.5%. But the reductions for WMFS for the first two years of the settlement were twice the national average and equated to 13% with a reduction in funding of £7.7m in 2011/12 and £2.5m in 2012/13.

The Comprehensive Spending Review indicated that the reductions for Fire and Rescue Authorities would be “back loaded” meaning that the largest proportion of the reduction would occur in Years 3 and 4.

We have had a freeze on firefighter recruitment since January 2010 and currently 7 operational staff leave each month. If we continue to freeze recruitment of fire-fighters we predict that the number of operational staff working on fire stations and available to attend incidents and prevention based activity will have reduced from 1,520 in April 2011 to 1,250 by April 2015.

We are not able to provide full details yet, of how we will change in the future, because we do not yet know what our budget settlement will be in future years and whether or not there will be a flat-rate cut across all the Fire and Rescue Authorities or whether we will receive a larger cut as we have in the first two years of the settlement period.

In December 2012 the Fire Authority was notified that its grant reduction for 2013/14 would be £6.0m and it was also provisionally indicated that there would be a further grant reduction in 2014/15 of £4.6m. These figures broadly equate to a flat line National Fire Service reduction. It is anticipated that there will be further grant reductions in 2015/16 and beyond, although there are no indications at this stage of the scale of those reductions, resulting in some uncertainty with the level of budget that will be available through the period covered by this strategy.

The 2013-16 strategy looks forward, moving on from a successful year where the Service has been involved in supporting a number of National events whilst maintaining its focus on prevention, protection and response. We will continue to reduce numbers of fires, provide education and safety advice, and offer a good service to local industry and commerce and confirming trust and confidence in emergency response and contingency plans. 2013-16 will continue to offer the day-to-day challenges of fire and rescue across the vibrant and exciting West Midlands conurbation.

A hardcopy of this document will be available to Members at the Fire Authority meeting on 18 February 2012 and available on CMIS as follows:

<http://94.236.33.181/cm5/Meetings/tabid/73/ctl/ViewMeetingPublic/mid/410/Meeting/2679/Committee/543/Default.aspx> -

(08 – Appendix 2 Community Safety Strategy - Draft)