

## Communications Strategy (2008/09)

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## Communications Strategy

### Summary

This Communications Strategy sets out clear objectives in effectively communicating the varied programme of initiatives that East Sussex Fire Authority undertake in order to help achieve safer and more sustainable communities and provide high quality local services. The intention is to outline an integrated communications strategy that delivers clear and consistent messages to all of our internal and external stakeholders. It will promote mutual understanding and encourage two-way, open and regular communication in order to keep people informed of the continued successes and achievements of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service personnel. In turn, this benefits the organisation and increases the opportunities for positive messages both internally and externally.

The interdependence of all of the Fire Authority strategies is a vital consideration to their effective collective implementation. For example, this Communications Strategy will be vital to the success of the People Management Strategy from an internal organisational perspective, and to those of Best Value and Community Fire Safety from an external perspective. (Paragraph 1.4)

The Communications Strategy supports the other strategies of the Fire Authority to ensure that services will be developed in consultation and partnership with the local community and East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service personnel, within the Integrated Risk Management planning process and the Best Value framework. Our success criteria include:

- Sustaining effective, regular and varied communications to support the Fire Authority and Service to achieve safer and more sustainable communities within East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove
- Ensuring that all published material adheres to the approved corporate style and be easily and instantly identifiable as originating from the Authority and Service
- Sustaining effective, regular and appropriate two-way communication relevant to the varied interests of all groups of internal and external stakeholders to ensure inclusive and informed consideration of views in strategic decision making, particularly in relation to local partnership and regional working
- Supporting staff to feel positive and motivated with a sense of ownership and commitment to East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and its organisational values
- Achieving a higher level of public awareness and satisfaction for the Authority and the Service measured through appropriate forms of public consultation
- Achieving a concise, understandable and sustained communications campaign to raise awareness of our key community safety objectives, activities and services of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service within our local communities
- Gaining recognition and awareness of our key messages in support of community safety goals
- Receiving local, regional and national recognition of the effectiveness of our communications strategy on a sustained basis.

Our Communication Strategy is also targeted to support our organisation to meet our diversity and equality aspirations. Equally, the diversity and equality aspirations will be widely communicated internally and externally. Appropriate equality impact assessments will be undertaken and approved in accordance with procedures. (Paragraph 2.1)

This Communications Strategy must also link into the strategic aims of the organisation. In this way, the Authority can put across relevant and consistent messages to the outside world. (Paragraph 3.1)

As an integral part of local government, the Fire Authority has a responsibility to build on its relationship with local people so that we understand, and are understood by, our local communities. The Fire Authority has an increasing role to play in listening and learning. Identifying the best ways for the public to talk to express their views on local service provision and listening to public opinion is a key part of any Communications Plan. (Paragraph 4.2)

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Fire Authority has approved a number of strategies. The Communications Strategy aims to improve upon the overall effectiveness of communications for both the Fire Authority and its Fire & Rescue Service.
- 1.2 The objective of this Strategy is to have a specialist integrated means of communication that encompasses all aspects of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service and improves communication to all internal and external stakeholders by using innovative mediums to cause maximum positive impact.
- 1.3 It aims to:
  - Present a clearer image of the Fire Authority to both the local community and Fire & Rescue Service personnel of its key community safety messages, commitment to providing effective service delivery, cost effectiveness and being a good employer
  - Give focus to certain services and priority areas to aid overall co-ordination
  - Take appropriate account of the joint communication programmes and initiatives of other local government organisations working within East Sussex and the City of Brighton and Hove
  - Take appropriate account of feedback from all forms of public consultation it undertakes in its policy decisions
  - Effectively communicate the achievements of ESFRS staff both within and outside the organisation
  - Deliver clear and consistent messages to our internal and external stakeholders
  - Encourages two-way communication in order to keep all communities better informed of the continuing success of East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service personnel in the achievement of our strategic aims and supporting corporate objectives.
- 1.4 The interdependence of all of the Fire Authority strategies is a vital consideration to their effective collective implementation. For example, the Fire Authority Communications Strategy will be vital to the success of the People Management Strategy from an internal organisational perspective, and to those of Best Value and Community Fire Safety from an external perspective.
- 1.5 The Communications Strategy supports the other strategies of the Fire Authority to ensure that services will be developed in consultation and partnership with the local community and East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service personnel within the Integrated Risk Management planning process and the Best Value framework through effective communication.

### **2. Diversity & Inclusion**

- 2.1 Our Communication Strategy will meet the diversity and equality aspirations. Equally, the diversity and equality aspirations will be widely communicated internally and externally. Appropriate equality impact assessments will be undertaken and approved in accordance with procedures (See Equality and Diversity Strategy)

### **3. East Sussex Fire Authority - Strategic Aims**

- 3.1 The Communications Strategy must link into the strategic aims of the organisation. In this way, the Authority can better advise, inform and consult on a relevant and consistent basis.
- 3.2 The strategic service aims of the Fire Authority are to discharge the statutory duties placed upon it; to protect and provide for the safety of the local communities; and protect and enhance the economy and environment of East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove. These are further defined in the Best Value Strategy.

### **4. Key Points**

- 4.1 The performance of the Fire Authority will increasingly be judged against an ever-widening range of performance measures and service outcomes.
- 4.2 As an integral part of local government, the Fire Authority has a responsibility to build on its relationship with local people so that we understand, and are understood by, our local communities. The Fire Authority has an increasing role to play in listening and learning. Identifying the best ways for the public to talk to express their views on local service provision and listening to public opinion is a key part of any Communications Plan.
- 4.3 The success of the Communications Strategy is dependent upon the full ownership of the Fire Authority and Fire & Rescue Service personnel and the continued development of communication

### **5. Fire Authority Audiences**

- 5.1 The Fire Authority Communications Strategy identifies its audiences and then addresses how it will target those audiences. For the Fire Authority these are:
- Local Residents
  - Staff
  - Business Community
  - The Media
  - Local Strategic Partnerships and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships
  - Community and voluntary groups
  - Other Key Users of services
  - Regional Management Board and Regional Offices
  - Members of Parliament
  - Communities and Local Government and the Audit Commission
  - East Sussex County Councillors/Brighton & Hove City Councillors

- Other local government organisations
- Trade Unions

### **6. Service Planning, Use of Resources and Value for Money Strategy Communication Requirements**

6.1 The agreed Strategy defines many of the communication methodologies that are in place. These include:

- The Integrated Risk Management Planning process
- The Strategic Plan (Five Year) that sets out the planned programme of service delivery which has been informed by the views of stakeholders
- The Annual Plan, for publication annually in June, which sets out previous performance against our service priorities and performance targets for the next financial year, to local people and their community representatives to both inform them of their views on the policy priorities of the Authority and seek further comment, for future consideration
- The Corporate Action Plans are working internal plans, which identifies the service priorities to help manage all the agreed tasks for the forthcoming year
- Borough and Station Action Plans which identifies the service priorities for stations to help them manage all the agreed tasks for the forthcoming year
- The Authority publishes an annual performance review assessment summarised in the Annual Report and Best Value Plan summary that is available on the Internet ([www.esfrs.org](http://www.esfrs.org)) and/or in all major public reference libraries in East Sussex
- The family of leaflets on the Fire Authority, 'After the Fire or Flood', and 'How to Complain' all provide useful information and further opportunities to express views.

6.2 The Fire Authority has established, or is a partner in, a number of consultation processes that includes:

- Public surveys
- Annual user surveys for operational activities, fire safety and commercial training
- East Sussex Local Government Association
- Local Strategic Partnerships
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships
- Staff surveys.

6.3 These processes of consultation will be further refined in the light of developing partnerships with other local public sector organisations.

## 7. Integrated Risk Management Plans

- 7.1 A key element of modernisation within the UK fire & rescue service is that individual fire authorities have adopted a locally determined risk-based approach to managing the fire risks and resources in their area. The Fire & Rescue Services Act and complementary National Framework has paved the way for the introduction of Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) that fire authorities use to assess and respond to risk in their community. - IRMPs enable authorities to deploy their resources outside the prescriptive 'attendance time' model with the individual fire authority given the final say on the appropriateness of local fire cover standards.
- 7.2 An IRMP is produced at regular intervals and current annual arrangements involve consulting during the Autumn on any detailed proposals for service improvement and modernisation for the forthcoming year with Service Planning, Revenue Budget setting all dovetailing over the period November to February. (See Budget Strategy for more details).

## 8. Resources And Key Communicators

- 8.1 The Fire Authority is uniquely placed with fire stations in most reasonably sized local communities across the whole of East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove, with a significant resource of people who, together, can be mobilised to take the key messages to the widest possible audience. In general, the opportunities for effective public communication are as follows:

Chairman of the Fire Authority Members Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive	Through talks, events, speaking engagements, receptions, through their special role at local level, both giving information and receiving feedback from residents.
Chief Fire Officer & Chief Executive and other Principal Officers	Through leadership roles / promoting the Fire Authority's key aims to Fire & Rescue Service personnel and with partner organisations And who must achieve a co-ordinated approach to what is said inside and outside the organisation
Corporate Management Team	Who channel communications to Fire & Rescue Service personnel to meet Fire Authority objectives. Who must achieve a co-ordinated approach to what is said inside and outside the organisation
Integrated Risk Information Services and Media Resources	Through promoting what the Fire Authority stands for and its services via the media, publications and other means.
Employees	Who can all influence people's perception of the Fire Authority and, as a group, represent a cross-section of the East Sussex community.

### **9. Internal And External Communications**

#### **9.1 Internal Communications**

9.1.1 It is important to look at how the Fire Authority gets its message out to its various audiences. Internal and external communications must operate in parallel to be effective.

9.1.2 Good internal communications - keeping people informed and listening to what our staff are telling us - benefits the whole organisation and increases the opportunities for positive messages from employees to the outside world.

9.1.3 Methods include:

- Service Brief (weekly)
- Newsletters (monthly)
- Corporate Management Team meetings (monthly) with full reporting of outcomes available for selective dissemination to relevant staff
- Other Standing committees and adhoc project teams with full reporting of outcomes available for selective dissemination to relevant staff (monthly/quarterly)
- Strategic Managers Seminars and Management Development Seminars (three times a year)
- Directorate Management Team meetings and dissemination of minutes/actions (monthly)
- Routine Away Days for sections facing key service issues to be discussed and priorities established
- Human Resource Development resource materials
- Dissemination of Fire Authority Service Planning documents and guidance leaflets (annually)
- Health and Safety Bulletins (signed by all personnel to record receipt of vital health and safety information)
- Other Newsletters attached to Service Brief updating personnel on key service issues.

#### **9.2 External Communications**

9.2.1 For the Fire Authority to have the greatest impact in terms of delivering its messages, it will develop its existing external communications programme and information material by the following methods:

- Further development of Integrated Risk Management Plans, associated consultation processes and supporting documentation for stakeholder/key partnership/agency and public consultation throughout East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove
- Development of local community plans for dissemination to local community organisations for consultation

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- Further development of Best Value Performance Plans, associated leaflets and supporting documentation for stakeholder/key partnership/agency and public consultation throughout East Sussex and the City of Brighton & Hove
- Effective range of East Sussex Fire Authority leaflets for public usage
- Community Fire Safety initiatives including schools programme
- 999 Emergency Services events, station open days and attendance at any other public events
- Appropriate use of Helpline numbers
- Consultation forum for business consultation purposes
- Working in partnership with other local government organisations/business community
- Public feedback surveys
- User Surveys for fires and fire safety visits
- Face to face contacts (e.g. councillors surgeries)
- Newspaper radio and TV press releases, video footage liaison arrangements etc.
- East Sussex Fire Authority Web site.

9.2.2 The Fire Authority Communications Strategy supports the following joint initiatives:

- Joint Communications Strategy Group (covering the five Borough/District areas within East Sussex/ ESCC/ and Fire Authority) which is working towards specific joint communication projects
- Responsible Authority Group working under the Crime and Disorder Act.

9.3 The Fire Authority Communications Strategy recognises both the revolution in new technology and the need to ensure opportunities for electronic communications are developed that keep pace with the future means of communication.

9.4 East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service sustains a comprehensive range of internal and external communication processes to support the Communications Strategy.

## **10. Public Information Survey**

10.1 The Fire Authority conducts Public Surveys on a regular basis, the outcomes of which are summarised in the Authority's Annual Plan and Integrated Risk Management Plan.

### **11. Training In Communications Skills**

- 11.1 The Fire Authority Communications Strategy requires that the key people involved - Members and staff - have the opportunity to be trained in communications skills if these are needed. . Advice is also available within the Members' Handbook.
- 11.2 Courses include media training, customer awareness, plain English and writing reports, presentation skills etc.

### **12. Communications Action Plan - Its Purpose**

- 12.1 The annual action plan will support the overall Communications Strategy by summarising the programme of initiatives and communication processes involved and will be developed during December of each year in conjunction with the Fire Authority and the Corporate Management Team.
- 12.2 The Action Plan will be reviewed annually and revised in line with the aims, objectives and messages the Fire Authority wishes to communicate.
- 12.3 The Strategy and Action Plan will be circulated to the Fire Authority and personnel.

### **13. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 13.1 A full equality impact assessment is being prepared to complement this Strategy. This is to ensure that our Strategy takes into account available community profiling information on the differing needs of needs of people living and working in our area and will further assist, along with risk reduction information to prioritise our future services.

### **14. References**

- 14.1 The following reference documents support this Strategy:
  - All Fire Authority Strategies
  - Fire Authority Strategic Plan
  - Annual (BVPP) Plan
  - Corporate Action Plans
  - Borough and Station Action Plans
  - Fire Authority Complaints leaflet