

SERVICE INFORMATION SYSTEM

TITLE	GFRS Consultation and Engagement Policy
CATEGORY	MANAGEMENT
NUMBER	MAN;A015d
ACTION	By all GFRS personnel
ORIGINAL AUTHOR	Business Support Manager (Chiefs Office)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	This Policy has been developed to ensure that all consultation and engagement undertaken by the Service is effective, efficient and consistent. It also provides the framework for all consultation and engagement that takes place throughout the Service.
--------------------------	---

Contents	Page
1 Introduction	2
2 Aim	2
3 Objectives	2
4 Roles and responsibilities	2
5 Timescales	3
6 Feedback and decision making	3
7 Evaluation	3
8 Consultation and engagement toolkit	3

Issued / Amended	Date
To be issued	

1 INTRODUCTION

Ongoing interaction between Grampian Fire and Rescue Service and stakeholders is an important part of policy and decision making. When developing new policies or considering changes to existing policies, procedures and practices the Service will make evidence based decisions that take into account the views of those affected. We will engage with our communities and stakeholders to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to have their say.

This Policy has been developed to ensure that all consultation and engagement undertaken by the Service is effective, efficient and consistent. We aim to continuously improve on our consultation and engagement process.

This Policy provides the framework for all consultation and engagement that takes place throughout the Service.

2 AIM

This Policy aims to support a process of informed and transparent decision making and planning, by improving the quality and effectiveness of consultation and engagement undertaken by or on behalf of the Service.

3 OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this Consultation and Engagement Policy are to:

- support Community Planning, service delivery and performance management processes
- share consultation and engagement results effectively and use them to inform policy development and service delivery wherever appropriate
- maintain an open dialogue with stakeholders, while giving due consideration to the risk of consultation fatigue in sections of the community
- openly and actively feedback to consultees on action resulting from consultation
- ensure that the Service satisfies its statutory duties to consult with all sections of the community and to publish the results of that consultation through appropriate media.

Formal consultation between the Service and Representative Bodies is achieved through a separate agreement and process. The objectives of this policy do not override this agreement and will aim to complement the engagement process with Representative Bodies.

4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Joint Fire and Rescue Board members are responsible for setting and approving consultations in relation to corporate policies and plans.
- Corporate Team are responsible for approving consultation relating to or affecting corporate policy, prior to referral to the Joint Board
- Service Managers are responsible for ensuring that all employees understand and apply the consultation process outlined in this Policy. Service Managers must ensure that stakeholders are consulted on key service and policy-making decisions.
- The Business Support Manager is responsible for providing support to managers to help apply the consultation process, for advising on the most appropriate consultation methodologies and for keeping a record of consultations carried out.

- All consultation exercises should have an identified and designated Principal Contact. The Principal Contact is responsible for ensuring that details of the consultation are submitted to the Business Support Manager and that those details are updated regularly.
- We will seek to consult through existing networks whenever possible, by making full and effective use of, for example Community Planning forums, Citizens' Panels and established service user groups and networks.

5 TIMESCALES

Grampian Fire and Rescue Service will aim to give stakeholders adequate time to prepare responses. It is recognised that the length of time will vary depending on the time of year, the level of response that is being sought and the format of consultation. Sufficient time will also be allowed for the results of consultation to be collated, analysed and considered, so that the results of consultation feed directly into the decision making process.

In the case of formal, written consultation the Service will aim, where possible, to meet the Government recommendation of a twelve week consultation period. There may be occasions where this is not possible or practical and on these occasions stakeholders will be told reasons for a shorter (or longer) consultation.

6 FEEDBACK AND DECISION MAKING

The full range of views expressed during consultation will be acknowledged as general feedback and, where appropriate, as individual responses. Feedback and reports will be published and distributed in an appropriate and timely manner.

Feedback will be provided to stakeholders, both on the results of consultation and on how they have been used, in order to encourage greater public participation in the future.

Consultation responses will be analysed and areas of agreement and disagreement will be reported to the relevant decision makers within the Service. The results of consultation will be weighed carefully together with other evidence and considerations before final decisions are made.

In some cases the results of consultation will be outweighed by other evidence or considerations; in such cases a clear and honest explanation of the decisive factors should be included in the feedback.

7 EVALUATION

The effectiveness of consultation should be evaluated and the results shared to encourage broader lessons to be learned. Evaluation will consider not only the number of responses received but also the quality, cost and timeliness of the consultation and the overall usefulness of the results in helping to inform decisions.

8 CONSULTATION TOOLKIT

A Consultation Toolkit has been developed to provide guidance on the principles of consultation, issues to think about when considering consultation and selecting appropriate methods of consultation.

The Business Support Manager will offer further advice and guidance on consultation issues and will manage the consultation toolkit and associated database.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT PROCEDURE SI

Introduction

Community engagement and consultation is at the heart of Community Planning and all Community Planning partners have a duty to engage communities in consultation in order to develop services and inform decision making.

Grampian Fire and Rescue Service recognised that community engagement and consultation is not something that is restricted to one-off projects or events but is an integral part of the work of all staff. Attendance at Community Planning meetings, presentations to community groups, hosting visits to fire stations, etc are all important ways of engaging with our communities. This is in addition to the more formal consultation methods used by the Service, such as consultation on draft plans.

However, for the purposes of this document, the focus is on organised community engagement and consultation in relation to specific events and projects, rather than day-to-day work.

What is a community?

A community may be defined as a group of people who all hold something in common. The concept of 'community' tends to be associated with two main aspects:

- People who share a locality or geographic place
- People who are from or share communities of interest

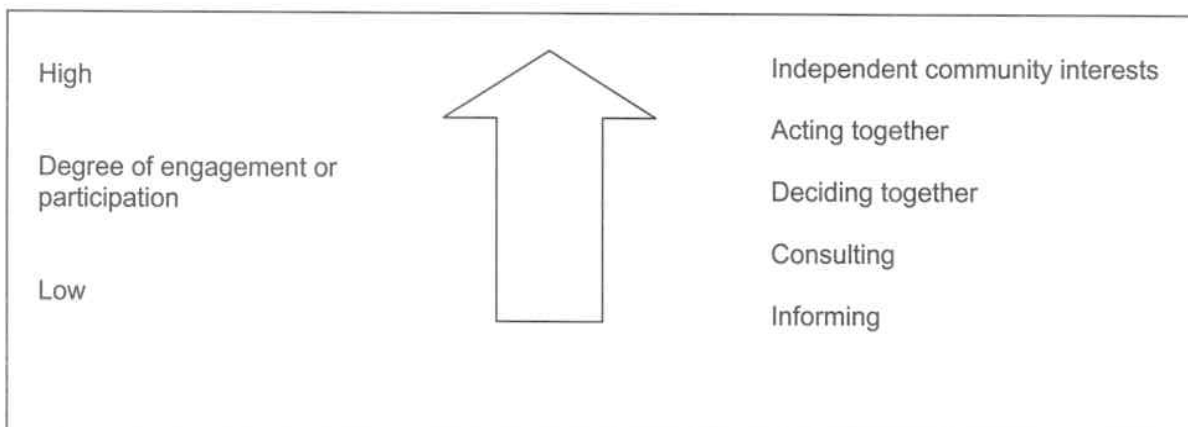
Communities of interest are groups of people who share an identity, for example ethnicity or religion, or who share an experience, for example people with a particular disability.

A person may be a member of multiple communities at any one time. Each of us are likely to move in and out of one or more communities over time. Some people may be unable or unwilling to identify with any community at all.

What is community engagement?

Many of the terms associated with community engagement (consultation, involvement, participation, etc.) are often used interchangeably and it is important for the Service to be clear about the scope of its activity in this respect.

In a general sense, "community engagement" can be seen as a catch-all term for a variety of ways of involving different stakeholder groups in decision making. The distinction between each approach relates to the intensity of involvement and the extent to which decision making is shared. This overall model is illustrated below:



The focus for GFRS is on consulting – in other words, GFRS wants to know what various stakeholders think and will give weight to this but are not delegating the decision making. The outcomes of the consultation activity will typically be considered alongside various other operational, technical, legal and financial factors.

National standards for community engagement

A set of national standards have been developed by the Scottish Government, designed to develop and improve community engagement activities to achieve high quality results and better public services.

Grampian Fire and Rescue Service has adopted the National Standards as its basis for community engagement.

For more information on the National Standards refer to the 'Our Communities' section of InfoZone, or to the National Standards for Community Engagement website.

Consultation with Representative Bodies

A formal consultation agreement between the Service and Representative Bodies is in place to set the process for focused consultation. The Consultation and Engagement Policy and Procedure will complement this agreement by putting Representative Body consultation into the wider context of engagement and consultation with all stakeholders.

GFRS consultation toolkit

A toolkit has been developed to assist staff who are responsible for one-off or major projects and activities to decide if consultation is required and if so, how best to carry it out. The toolkit and associated guidance, information sheets and decision sheets are available on InfoZone at: Service > Our Communities > Community Engagement

The following flowchart and sections will outline what staff are required to do.

Step one – determine whether consultation is appropriate and/or required

The Service may need to or wish to consult with stakeholders for a variety of reasons:

- Because it is a statutory requirement
- To capture a wider range of views on potential options and thus enhance the quality of decision making
- To ensure that decisions that are reached ultimately have the greatest degree of stakeholder commitment
- To identify current strengths and weaknesses of service provision, with the intention of improving services.

There will probably be two main "prompts" for engagement:

- "Routine" engagement, which ties in to the Service business planning processes, namely the annual consultation on IRMP and Service Plans.
- "Bespoke" engagement, which relates to occasions where a change is being contemplated which could have a significant impact on one or other group of stakeholders, for example the setting of emergency response standards, changes to where and how appliances are based at stations or changes in crewing arrangements.

There will be some instances where proposed changes do not have any risk of impacting negatively on any one group and which are not significant. In these cases, the Service would not expect to undertake consultation activity, but the rationale for this should be noted when that change is being proposed.

If consultation is considered necessary or desirable, the following steps will be conducted. If consultation is not considered necessary, the Business Support Manager will note this.

Decision Sheet 1 should be completed and submitted to the Business Support Manager. Decision Sheet 1 will note the requirements for consultation, should consultation be necessary. It will also note the rationale should consultation not be considered necessary.

Step two – identifying stakeholders to participate in consultation

The terms 'stakeholder' and 'community' can be used interchangeably and generally mean the same - people or groups who are likely to have an interest in the proposals being made by the Service.

Who is to be involved in the consultation will change depending upon the subject. The Business Support Manager will meet with the lead officer for the project being consulted upon to determine appropriate stakeholder groups or communities.

Step three – deciding how the consultation will take place

Once relevant stakeholders have been identified, there will be a need to consider an appropriate mix of consultation methods to be used. Some methods of consultation are better suited to some stakeholders than others. For example, it may not always be appropriate to use electronic consultation for when consulting with older people, who are less likely to use IT.

Each method of consultation provides a different mix of breadth and depth and, in reality, no single method is "perfect". The challenge for any consultation is to identify the mix of methods that provide the necessary breadth and depth. These methods also need to be assessed against a number of factors such as efficiency, practicality, cost and so on.

The Business Support Manager will meet with the lead officer for the project being consulted upon to determine appropriate methods of consultation.

Step four – results and feedback

Results from consultation will be analysed and fed back to the project lead officer(s) by the Business Support Manager. It will be the responsibility of the project lead officer(s) to act upon the results in an appropriate way.

It is also important that feedback is given to stakeholders and communities who have participated in the consultation. A lack of feedback on the results of consultation is one of the most common criticisms of community engagement activity and is an area that the Service will need to consider. The Business Support Manager will meet with the lead officer to determine the best way of providing feedback to participants.

Recording consultation activity

All consultation activity carried out by GFRS will be recorded and monitored by the Business Support Manager, using the VOiCE database. VOiCE is a database developed by the Scottish Community

Development Centre and is designed to assist organisations to design and deliver effective community engagement.

Process for Consultation

FLOWCHART 1

