

# North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service

## Communications Strategy, 2015-18

### **1. Introduction & context**

North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service recognises the importance of effective external and internal communication.

This strategy demonstrates how the Service will deliver communications support to meet the Strategic Aims. In particular, it shows how two-way communication with the public and internal audiences will be achieved.

The Service is striving to further improve its internal and external communications in a challenging environment, with budget reductions meaning that more must be achieved with less.

The strategy covers a three-year period and will be reviewed annually. Communication plans for major projects or issues will be maintained and reviewed by Corporate Management Board.

### **2. Scope**

The strategy covers internal and external communications, including: media relations; publications; internet-based communication including website and intranet; stakeholder communications; events; brand and corporate identity; and community safety campaigns.

The strategy also covers how the Service will engage with the community when making decisions that affect them, primarily when developing the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

It links to, but does not consider in detail, two other important aspects of communications:

- Major incidents and emergencies: which are considered as part of emergency planning procedures. However, many of the communications resources and channels referred to in this strategy will be deployed during such incidents.
- Delivery of the Prevention (Community Safety) Strategy
- Delivery of the Protection (Technical Fire Safety) Strategy

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### 3. Aims and objectives

The Communications Strategy's aims are:

**Community safety:** To support the Service's vision by helping to cut deaths and injuries through community safety campaigns and interventions.

**Community engagement & consultation:** To support public consultation and engagement through improved and accessible communication and information.

**Delivering efficiency and value:** To develop new approaches to communication which reduce costs whilst providing effective and measurable results.

**Internal relations:** To maintain an excellent relationship with all employees through open and timely two-way communication.

**Managing reputation:** To promote and celebrate the success of the organisation and to enhance its reputation.

**Operations and emergencies:** To provide the resources and communications channels to allow us to work with partners to deliver accurate and timely public information on operational incidents and emergencies.

**Partnership working:** To support the work of our partners and play our part in campaigns and initiatives aimed at improving public safety.

### 4. Audiences

The work we do impacts upon the safety of every individual in our area of operation. Our communications strategy therefore seeks to make important information accessible to all. In practical terms, this means identifying our audiences to allow targeting of important information to specific groups of people:

**Business Community:** Our work to improve safety in business (and other non-domestic) premises requires specific communications programmes

**External Stakeholders:** People affected by the topic, leaders and influencers of public opinion. This includes politicians (local, regional, national), business leaders, the media, the voluntary sector and other public services.

**Internal Stakeholders:** Our employees are our most important asset. Effective two-way communication with staff and representative bodies (e.g. trade unions) is essential to maintain and build upon good internal relations and to deliver an effective fire and rescue service to the people of North Yorkshire.

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**Our Communities:** This includes every individual in North Yorkshire and the City of York

**Vulnerable people:** For community safety work, we place particular influence on vulnerable people, including the elderly, children and those with disabilities; that is, those who are proven to be most at risk.

## 5. Key messages

We have developed a set of key messages which reflect our Strategic Aims. They are:

### ***“North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service...***

*... is a modern, cost effective and efficient organisation which is striving to improve further and to deliver the most effective fire service possible for the people of North Yorkshire.”*

*... provides a professional and resilient response for fire and rescue incidents and emergencies.”*

*... actively promotes campaigns and interventions which improve the safety of local people.”*

*... listens to local people and responds to their needs.”*

*... works with businesses to ensure that safety standards in the workplace are maintained and safety regulations enforced.”*

*...is committed to open and honest communications and a two-way dialogue with all staff.”*

## 6. Brand and corporate identity

We recognise the importance of the image we present to the outside world. This includes the professionalism, quality and consistency of public safety literature, advertising and website, as well as the visual image projected by vehicles, uniforms, signage and stationery.

The Service seeks to ensure consistency and quality of its visual image, whilst ensuring that any communication is undertaken in a cost-effective manner.

## 7. Communication channels and tactics

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North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service uses a wide range of communication channels and tactics, appropriate to the target audience.

## **7.1 External communications tactics**

A significant consideration for the choice of communications tactics is the wide range of communication media and channels.

North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service uses digital communication methods, partly to reach the widest possible audience and partly because of the significant cost advantage which digital enjoys.

Nonetheless, we recognise the value that printed publications, newspapers and magazines still have for many people and will continue the appropriate use of these communication channels.

### **Media relations**

North Yorkshire Fire & Rescue Service maintains excellent relationships with print and broadcast media across the Authority's area, providing timely information on operational incidents, service changes and news on the achievements of the organisation. This makes considerable demands upon the organisation and its partners because of the frequency of incidents and the very diverse nature of the media – the area has over 20 major news outlets, including daily and weekly newspapers and radio and television stations.

### **Website**

The Service's website is a focal point for external communications. Its emphasis is on communicating community safety messages and campaigns, informing the public of operational incidents using a newsfeed facility, and giving respondents the opportunity to interact with the Service – for example to book a home safety visit or to respond to public consultations. I

### **Social media**

We use social media as a cost-effective and dynamic way to promote community safety messages.

### **Community safety campaigns**

A number of campaigns are planned on an annual basis around key community safety issues, as set out in our Prevention Strategy.

### **Publications**

Information about our organisation and community safety will be provided to the public on our website. We will also provide printed versions, where necessary, to meet the needs of the audience.

## **7.2 Internal communications tactics**

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The Service recognises the difficulties in communicating effectively with a workforce which is dispersed across multiple locations across a large geographical area, with many staff working outside normal office hours.

We place great emphasis on internal communications, using a wide range of tactics to ensure that information reaches every employee and that they have the opportunity to raise issues and questions.

The programme includes:

### **Briefings**

All teams are briefed on a regular and structured basis, both by line managers and by senior officers. Principal Officers, Area Managers and Group Managers have an integrated programme of briefings, which ensures that all employees have regular opportunities for two-way, face-to-face contact with senior managers. This includes station visits, Watch Manager/Team Leader briefings and seminars for middle managers.

### **Intranet**

The intranet site will continue to provide access to essential information for all staff. This will be the primary mechanism for document management.

### **E-newsletters**

The staff e-newsletter "Call Out" is issued regularly and special staff newsletters are used for dissemination of other important messages.

## **8. Consultation**

We will aim to seek views of external stakeholders, internal stakeholders and communities for any major changes to the Service. For changes that only affect how we organise our work we will seek the views of internal stakeholders and, where appropriate external stakeholders. Where statutory consultation is required we will include this in the wider consultation.

### **External Consultation**

This will be undertaken using a range of methods including:

- Direct mail to potentially affected people or groups
- Public meetings
- Letters to stakeholders
- Briefings to political leaders and key stakeholders
- Website, press releases and social media to publicise the consultation
- Internet based surveys will be the primary method for capturing responses to the consultation

### **Internal Consultation**

This will be undertaken using a range of methods including:

- Staff newsletters

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- Letters direct to staff
- Meetings with representative bodies
- Briefings at workplaces
- Information published on the intranet
- Internet based surveys will be the primary method for capturing responses to the consultation

## **9. Diversity and accessibility**

We recognise our responsibility to provide information which is accessible to all. We meet this requirement by making information available in a range of formats, including large print, audio and minority languages, where appropriate. The website is designed to aid accessibility.

## **10. Resources**

There is a Communications & Media Officer, who is supported by other staff as necessary. An external agency also provides additional support when needed.

All operational middle managers are trained in media-handling techniques to provide communications support when required, including during major incidents.

Communications training programmes are commissioned to ensure that relevant staff are fully conversant with current techniques. This includes media handling, website management and social media communications.