

## **Avon Fire Authority**

### **Service Plan and Budget 2023-26 Consultation Report**

<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>Avon Fire Authority</b>
<b>MEETING DATE:</b>	<b>29 March 2023</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive</b>

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# 1. Methodology and respondent profile

## Background and introduction

The requirement for an Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) was introduced in 2003 and was included in the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (now known as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities). This was given statutory effect by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004.

The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework for England 2018 states that each Fire and Rescue Authority must produce an IRMP that:

- Identifies and assesses all foreseeable fire and rescue related community risks;
- Puts in place appropriate prevention, protection, and response measures to reduce those risks;
- Sets out a Risk Based Inspection Programme (RBIP) to enforce the provisions of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005;
- Covers at least a three year time span;
- Reflects effective consultation with the community, our staff, and partner agencies;
- Is easily accessible and publicly available.

Integrated risk management planning is simply about using resources in the most effective way to save lives, improve public safety and reduce emergency incidents. It is an approach that:

- identifies who or what is most at risk of fire and other emergencies
- determines where they are and how best to reach them
- identifies the best way to reduce and manage the risk
- ensures that resources are deployed in proportion to the size of the risk.

As a Service, we have two strategic priorities which will focus our work activity, these are: Making our Communities **Safer** and Making our Service **Stronger**

In delivering these strategic priorities, the Service will focus our work across seven overarching objectives:

1. Prevention
2. Protection
3. Response
4. Resilience
5. Improving our Service
6. Investing in our Staff
7. Transformation

## Methodology

Consultation on the Service Plan and Budget ran for a 4-week period from 3-31 January 2023, through an online questionnaire. The survey set out multiple questions asking for views on our actions identified to address local risks under the seven overarching objectives, as well as on value for money and our budget.

In total 444 questionnaires responses were received (this compares to 210 responses received to the Service Plan consultation which ran in 2022).

The online questionnaire was hosted on Survey Monkey, with a direct link published on the Avon Fire & Rescue Service website homepage. The questionnaire was anonymous, with the aim of encouraging responses, and the consultation timeframe and activity was considered proportionate to the light touch refresh of the actions within the Service Plan.

Listening to the feedback from the 2022 consultation, the aim was to improve the accessibility of the survey by reducing the number of questions and therefore the average completion time (from 15 minutes to less than 10 minutes), reducing jargon and pulling out poignant parts of the Service Plan, rather than redirecting to other documents.

The table below outlines the key communication and engagement activity carried out during the consultation period:

Key stakeholders	Methods of communication/engagement
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online survey published on Survey Monkey, available via homepage of Avon Fire &amp; Rescue Service website – <a href="http://www.avonfire.gov.uk">www.avonfire.gov.uk</a>.</li> <li>• Local media (over 100 contacts/outlets) and subsequent media briefings and coverage via press release (2 releases, 8,100 views).</li> <li>• Social media content – organic and targeted, paid for advertising across Twitter (10 posts, 8,747 reach), Facebook (7 posts, 9,920 reach), Next Door and Instagram.</li> <li>• Community check in – 60 live viewers, 2,200 views of the recorded video posted on Facebook and 2,313 reach</li> <li>• Information shared for wider circulation with Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum, Warning and Informing Group.</li> <li>• Included in Chief Fire Officer’s weekly update to Avon Fire Authority Members.</li> <li>• E-mail distribution to the recruitment mailing list (approx. 7,000).</li> <li>• Shared with community contacts distribution list (approx. 20 partners).</li> </ul>
Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online survey accessible via Survey Monkey and the AF&amp;RS website, with alternative formats available on request.</li> <li>• Details published on the intranet.</li> <li>• Everybody email sent to 1,000 recipients.</li> <li>• Publicised in <i>The Shout</i>, a weekly internal communication.</li> <li>• Shared on internal social media channels.</li> <li>• Included in discussions at Station, Control and Workplace visits.</li> <li>• Details shared and update provided to Service Leadership Team.</li> <li>• Emails sent to Unions – Fire Brigades Union, Fire and Rescue Services Association and Unison.</li> </ul>
Partners and local businesses	<p>The following partners and local businesses were all emailed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local authority Leaders and Chief Executives.</li> <li>• Avon and Somerset Constabulary.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avon and Somerset Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.</li> <li>• South West Ambulance Service Foundation Trust.</li> <li>• Neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services.</li> <li>• Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum.</li> <li>• Business West.</li> <li>• Bristol Chamber of Commerce.</li> <li>• West of England Combined Authority.</li> <li>• West of England Local Enterprise Partnership.</li> <li>• Federation of Small Businesses.</li> <li>• Local MPs.</li> </ul>
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**Respondent profile**

A total of 444 responses were received during the consultation period.

The survey was also set up to ensure that only one response was permitted per URL, discouraging multiple entries from the same respondent. All questions were optional.

The decision was taken to anonymise the survey to encourage increased engagement in the responses provided. However, it is assumed from the language used in the free text responses, a proportion of these individuals/responses are closely associated to the fire and rescue service community.

An optional ‘About You’ section was included at the end of the survey, to help us better understand the profile of those responding and draw assumptions on the effectiveness of our consultation activity in engaging with our stakeholders.

Of those who opted to complete the ‘About You’ section, just over half of respondents (58.8%, 174 people) were male, 32.8% (97 respondents) were female, 0.6% (2 respondents) non-binary and 7.7% (23 respondents) preferring not to say (148 respondents did not provide their gender).

The majority of the responses came from the 65+ (20.4%, 61 respondents) age group. Of the 299 respondents who provided their age range (145 did not provide their age) there was an equal spread of ages between 16-64 years.

One quarter of respondents (25%, 75 people) stated they had a disability or health condition (of the 225 people that responded to this part of the survey).

The majority of respondents (72.7%, 211 people) described their ethnic group or background as English, with responses provided by people from 8 other ethnic groups and background including Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Welsh, Scottish and Gypsy or Irish Traveller. 154 people did not provide a response to this question.

Further data was gathered in relation to respondents’ sexual orientation, religious beliefs, caring responsibilities, and postcode locations.

Respondents were also asked how they heard about the consultation, with the majority (50.9%, 118 responses) hearing about the consultation through social media, followed by email (13.4%, 31 responses) and through local media outlets. 213 people chose not to respond to this question.

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## 2. Executive summary

There has been a 110% increase in responses during this 4-week consultation period (444 responses) compared to the 210 responses gathered during the 7-week Service Plan Consultation in 2022. Despite extensive communication and engagement activity, it is recognised that this represents a small percentage (0.04%) of the population served by Avon Fire & Rescue Service.

Over half (60%, 126 people) strongly agree or agree that our planning process is suitable and sufficient and 80.9% of respondents (140 people) strongly agree or agree with the risk identified to them and our local communities across the Avon Fire & Rescue Service area. A range of feedback was provided on our planning process and identified risk and can be found within this report.

Responses to our actions to address local risk for each of the seven objectives were as follows:

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Strongly agree/agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know/other</b>
Prevention (444 responses)	79.51% (353)	8.33% (37)	6.08% (27)	6.08% (27)
Protection (409 responses)	83.13% (340)	6.36% (26)	2.94% (12)	7.58% (31)
Response (380 responses)	79.48% (302)	6.84% (26)	4.22% (16)	9.47% (36)
Resilience (356 responses)	73.87% (263)	11.80% (42)	7.59% (27)	6.74% (24)
Improving our Service (342 responses)	72.81% (249)	10.53% (36)	6.73% (23)	9.94% (34)
Investing in our Staff (336 responses)	75.59% (254)	9.23% (31)	4.76% (16)	10.42% (35)
Transformation (334 responses)	74.85% (250)	11.68% (39)	4.79% (16)	8.69% (29)

All objectives received further feedback, ideas and suggestions for consideration and a breakdown of these responses can be found within this report.

This consultation also included questions in relation to the budget. For the financial year 2023/24, central Government have increased the flexibility for the fire precept to £5 per band D property (which equates to less than 10p per week). This represents an increase of 6.24% on the fire precept part of the council tax, which will help us to mitigate the increased costs we are facing as a Service and the subsequent impact on our communities following the unprecedented inflationary rates (currently at 10.1%) in 2022/23. Therefore, the Service recommended this increase to our 2023/24 budget.

Of the 329 responses to this question, 74.77% (246 people) either strongly agree or agree that the Service should consider increasing its charge for 2023/24 by £5 of the current precept. Since the consultation, this recommended increase in the precept has been approved by the Fire Authority.

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## 3. Results

The following results provide the statistics captured to demonstrate whether those who responded either strongly agree/agree or strongly disagree/disagree with our Service Plan actions. For the majority of each of the questions, a free text follow-up question was asked, requiring any further thoughts, suggestions, and ideas from respondents.

Full responses from the Survey Monkey questionnaire are available upon request.

### **Q1 – Do you agree with our actions to address local risk for Prevention?**

Of the 444 respondents to this question, 42.12% (187 people) strongly agree and 37.39% (166 people) agree with the Prevention actions to address local risk.

Of the total respondents, 4.50% (20 people) disagree and 1.58% (7 people) strongly disagree; 2.48% (11 people) have responded with don't know.

When asked if there is anything that appears missing from our Prevention activity, we received 16 free text responses including the following suggestions: *“empowering crews to signpost vulnerable people to support”* and *“working more with local outreach projects”*. Other responses suggested increasing public engagement through digital assets, however a few respondents felt that this engagement should be dealt with by other agencies.

### **Q2 – Do you agree with our actions to address local risk for Protection?**

Of the 409 respondents to this question, 42.05% (172 people) strongly agree and 41.08% (168 people) agree with our Protection actions to address local risk.

Of the total respondents, 1.96% (8 people) disagree and 0.98% (4 people) strongly disagree; 2.69% (11 people) have responded with don't know.

When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from our Protection objective, we received 20 free text responses. Within those free responses, suggestions were submitted to improve education for small businesses and requesting more insight on the issues arising from high rise accommodation. Responders suggested: *“spot checks, communicating requirements to small businesses”* and the need to have more information in relation to our Grenfell response.

### **Q3 – Do you agree with our actions to address local risk for Response?**

Of the 380 respondents to this question, 51.32% (195 people) strongly agree and 28.16% (107 people) agree with our Response actions to address local risk.

Of the total respondents, 2.11% (8 people) disagree and 2.11% (8 people) strongly disagree; 1.58% (6 people) have responded with don't know.

When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from our Response objective, we received 30 free text responses. Within those free responses, concerns were raised regarding resources and training needed to cover medical response, and suggestions that we work collaboratively to lessen the impact of on street parking access. These points were highlighted in the following comments: *“[The Fire Service] needs additional funding before undertaking medical responses and flooding incidents”* and *“more involved with planning departments with lack of street parking and the subsequent effect [on] emergency access”*.

### **Q4 – Do you agree with our actions to address local risk for Resilience?**

Of the 356 respondents to this question, 38.20% (136 people) strongly agree and 35.67% (127 people) agree with our Resilience actions to address local risk.

Of the total respondents, 5.90% (21 people) disagree and 1.69% (6 people) strongly disagree; 2.53% (9 people) have responded with don't know.

When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from our Resilience objective, we received 15 free text responses. Some of which raised issues of firefighter pay or more flexibility for reserve firefighters so they can cover a wider area, including the following comments: *"increase reserve capacity in all communities"* and *"increase pay"*.

#### **Q5 – Do you agree with our actions to address local risk for Improving our Service?**

Of the 342 respondents to this question, 37.72% (129 people) strongly agree and 35.09% (120 people) agree with our actions for Improving our Service.

Of the total respondents, 4.68% (16 people) disagree and 2.05% (7 people) strongly disagree; 1.75% (6 people) have responded with don't know.

When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from Improving our Service objective, we received 28 free text responses, this included the following comments: *"consider peer reviews"* and *"consider revelations from the London Fire Brigade report... to ensure best working practices in Avon"*, whilst others felt that the plans did not focus enough on operational response believing *"investment in response is a better way of serving your community"*.

#### **Q6 – Do you agree with our actions outlined in Investing in our staff?**

Of the 336 respondents to this question, 45.83% (154 people) strongly agree and 29.76% (100 people) agree with our actions for Investing in our Staff.

Of the total respondents, 2.38% (8 people) disagree and 2.38% (8 people) strongly disagree; 2.68% (9 people) have responded with don't know.

When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from Investing in our Staff objective, we received 26 free text responses including the following comments: *"bring in experience and best practice from outside"*, *"proactively target why we don't retain diverse staff"* and *"health, fitness, wellbeing and welfare are key"*.

#### **Q7 – Do you agree with our actions outlined in Transformation?**

Of the 334 respondents to this question, 37.13% (124 people) strongly agree and 37.72% (126 people) agree with our actions for Transformation.

Of the total respondents, 3.89% (13 people) disagree and 0.90% (3 people) strongly disagree; 2.10% (7 people) have responded with don't know.

When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from our Transformation objective, we received 22 free text responses, this included the following comments: *"what part does collaboration play in transformation"* and *"consider refreshers of the new systems in place and backups in case the tech fails"*. Whilst many supported digital transformation, the importance of putting people at the centre of any developments was key.

**Q8 – Avon Fire & Rescue Service currently costs each taxpayer 10p per day. Do you consider Avon Fire & Rescue Service good value for money?**

Of the 329 people who responded to this question, 54.10% (178 people) strongly agree and 24.32% (80 people) agree the Service provides value for money.

Of the total respondents, 10.94% (36 people) neither agree nor disagree, 4.26% (14 people) disagree and 2.43% (8 people) strongly disagree; 3.95% (13 people) have responded with don't know.

**Q9 – How much do you agree or disagree that it is reasonable for Avon Fire & Rescue Service to consider increasing its charge for the year 2023/24 by £5 of our current precept?**

For the financial year 2023/24, central Government have increased the flexibility for the fire precept to £5 per band D property (which equates to less than 10p per week). The Service will be recommending this increase to our 2023/24 budget.

Of the 329 responses to this question, 48.33% (159 people) strongly agree and 26.44% (87 people) agree that the Service should consider increasing its charge for 2023/24 by £5 of the current precept.

Of those respondents, 10.33% (34 people) neither agree nor disagree, 6.08% (20 people) disagree and 6.69% (22 people) strongly disagree; 2.13% (7 people) responded with don't know.

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## **4. Conclusion**

We would like to thank all those members of the community, staff and our partners who took part in the Service Plan and Budget 2023-2026 consultation. All feedback and comments have been considered within the final Service Plan 2023-2026. In response to feedback, we have increased the narrative on our response to Grenfell and outlined our cultural journey and future intention further.

Given the extent of our communication and engagement activity, it is acknowledged there has been a fairly low level of response to the consultation. This may be partly due to the nature and subject matter of the actions, as well as despite people having views about Avon Fire & Rescue Service, they may not wish to take part in the consultation process. For future consultation processes, we will endeavour to increase engagement by providing a longer window for input and views on our Service Planning, working closely with our DICE team to ensure we gather more feedback from our diverse community.

Despite this, the results show that overall, the majority of people who responded to the survey support our actions to address local risk under our seven overarching objectives as outlined in the Service Plan.

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