

## Avon Fire Authority Service Plan 2024-2028 Consultation Report

<b>MEETING:</b>	Avon Fire Authority
<b>MEETING DATE:</b>	Wednesday 20 March 2024
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Chief Fire Officer / Chief Executive

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# 1. Methodology and respondent profile

## Background and introduction

The requirement for a Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 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 a CRMP 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.

Community 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**

Making our Service **Stronger**

The Service Plan 2024-2028, which includes the CRMP, will set out Avon Fire Authority's (AFA) strategic aims and priorities, acting as a point of reference for our staff, partners, and communities. It will highlight the areas that we consider are important, enabling us to execute our core Service activities excellently while delivering continuous improvement. Our strategic objectives aim to set a realistic and achievable vision for Avon Fire & Rescue Service (AF&RS) while ensuring we retain and improve our service to the public.

In December 2023, the AFA approved the [Service Plan – draft objectives for consultation](#), outlining plans for the future of the Service. It was agreed the document would be for consultation with our local communities for their views to be incorporated into the final Service Plan 2024-2028.

## Methodology

Consultation on the Service Plan 2024-2028 draft objectives ran for an eight-week period from 21 December 2023 – 14 February 2024, through an online questionnaire. Hard copies and copies in alternative languages and formats were available on request.

The survey set out multiple questions, asking for views on our draft strategic objectives and key actions to address risks in our communities and to strengthen our Service for the future.

In total, 453 questionnaire responses were received (this compares to 444 responses received to the Service Plan consultation which ran in 2023).

The online questionnaire was hosted on Survey Monkey, with a direct link published on the AF&RS website, alongside a document outlining the actions that underpin each of the draft objectives. The questionnaire was anonymous with the aim of encouraging responses.

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

<b>Key stakeholders</b>	<b>Methods of communication/engagement</b>
Public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online survey published on Survey Monkey, available via Avon Fire &amp; Rescue Service website – <a href="http://www.avonfire.gov.uk">www.avonfire.gov.uk</a>. Alternative formats available on request</li> <li>• Local media (over 100 contacts/outlets) and subsequent media briefings and coverage via press release (2 releases, 8,700 views)</li> <li>• Social media content – organic and targeted, paid for advertising across Facebook and Instagram (32,936 reach and 848 clicks).</li> <li>• Virtual community event to present and discuss draft objectives and gather feedback – recording then posted on social media (Facebook Live – 2,400 views and Instagram Live – 780 views)</li> <li>• Information shared for wider circulation with Avon and Somerset Local Resilience Forum, Warning and Informing Group</li> <li>• Dedicated consultation inbox set up</li> <li>• Included in Chief Fire Officer’s weekly update to Avon Fire Authority Members</li> <li>• Emails sent to local community centres</li> <li>• Email distribution to the recruitment mailing list (approx. 7,000)</li> <li>• Email distribution to community contacts (approx. 133 partners)</li> <li>• Action on Hearing Loss</li> <li>• Babbasa</li> <li>• Barton Hill Settlement</li> <li>• Bath East Asian and Chinese Group</li> <li>• Bath Islamic Society</li> <li>• BANES Interfaith Group</li> <li>• Bath Polish Association</li> <li>• Bristol Black Carers</li> <li>• Bristol Refugee Rights</li> <li>• Bristol Somali Forum</li> <li>• Bristol Muslim Cultural Society</li> <li>• Broad Plain Riverside Youth Project</li> <li>• Creative Youth Network</li> <li>• Diversity Trust</li> <li>• LGBT Bristol</li> <li>• South Gloucestershire Disability Equality Network</li> <li>• WECIL</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Off the Record, Bath and North East Somerset</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 1000 recipients</li> <li>• Details shared and update provided to Service Leadership Team (SLT)</li> <li>• Individual emails sent to SLT, Area Managers, Group Managers and Heads of Departments</li> <li>• Publicised in 'The Shout'</li> <li>• SD Memo circulated to 1000 recipients</li> <li>• Shared on internal social media channels</li> <li>• Details shared in Staff Engagement Network meetings (approx.30 attendees)</li> <li>• Included in discussions at Station, Control and Workplace visits</li> <li>• Invitations to take part and to share information sent to Unions – Fire Brigades Union, Fire and Rescue Services Association and Unison</li> <li>• Included in the CFO video blog and SLT roundup video (450 views)</li> </ul>
Partners and local businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emails to all local authority Leaders and Chief Executives</li> <li>• Avon and Somerset Constabulary</li> <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>• Stand Against Racism and Inequality (SARI)</li> <li>• Local schools and academy's</li> <li>• Local MPs</li> <li>• Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership</li> </ul>

## Respondent profile

A total of 453 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 respondents.

The decision was taken to make the survey anonymous to encourage increased engagement and honesty in the responses provided. The language and terminology used in the free text responses suggests that many respondents 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 the 290 who provided their gender, just over half of respondents (54.8%, 159 people) were men, 27.6% (80 respondents) were women, 1.7% (5 respondents) non-binary, 0.3% (1 respondent) was intersex and 15.5% (45 respondents) preferred not to say.

Of the 292 who answered the age question, the dominant group of responses (14%, 41 respondents) came from the 65+ age group and there was an equal spread between 16-64 years.

Of the 290 who answered the question about disability, two thirds of respondents (65.2%, 189 people) stated that they did not have a disability nor health condition (34 people preferred not to say).

Of the 291 who responded to the question about ethnicity, the majority (59.8%, 174 people) described their ethnic group or background as White English. With responses provided by people from 11 other ethnic groups and backgrounds including White and Black Caribbean, White and Asian, Bangladeshi, Welsh, Scottish, Gypsy or Irish Traveller, African and Caribbean.

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. Of the 229 who responded, the majority (43.2%, 99 responses) heard about the consultation through social media, followed by email (17.5%, 40 responses).

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## 2. Executive summary

The number of responses from previous consultations has been maintained, with a slight increase in responses during this 8-week consultation period (453 responses). Despite extensive communication and engagement activity, it is recognised that this represents a small percentage (0.02%) of the population served by AF&RS.

Responses to our plans to address local risk for each of the six objectives were:

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Strongly agree/agree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	<b>Disagree/strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
Prevention (447 responses)	80.32% 359 responses	8.5% 38 responses	9.62% 43 responses	1.6% 7 responses
Protection (390 responses)	79.23% 309 responses	13.08% 51 responses	6.67% 26 responses	1% 4 responses
Response (350 responses)	79.71% 279 responses	8% 28 responses	10.57% 37 responses	1.7% 6 responses
Resilience (334 responses)	76.35% 255 responses	12.28% 41 responses	9.88% 33 responses	1.5% 5 responses
Improving our Service (321 responses)	70.71% 227 responses	15.58% 50 responses	11.22% 36 responses	2.5% 8 responses
Investing in our Staff (315 responses)	77.46% 244 responses	11.11% 35 responses	9.84% 31 responses	1.6% 5 responses

All objectives received further feedback, ideas and suggestions for consideration and a summary of these responses, alongside our AF&RS response, can be found within this report.

A key theme identified throughout the consultation feedback was on the Service's plans in relation to a potential reduction in firefighter posts.

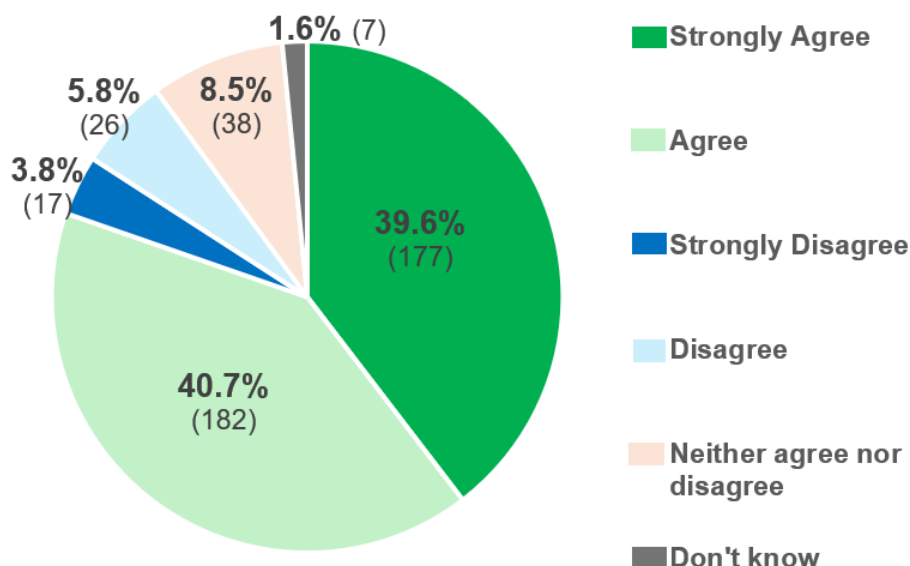
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### 3. Results

The following results provide statistics which demonstrate whether those who responded either strongly agree/agree or strongly disagree/disagree with our Service Plan draft objectives and actions. For each of the questions, a free text comment box also encouraged respondents to include any other thoughts, suggestions, feedback, and ideas.

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

How the 447 respondents answered this question is shown in the pie-chart below.

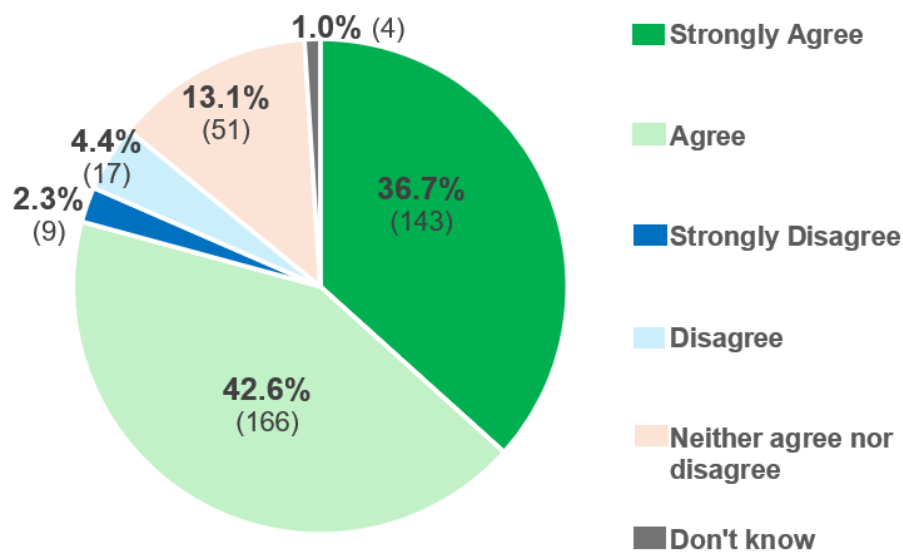


When asked if there is anything that appears missing from our Prevention activity, we received 50 comments, which included:

- Questions on what does working with vulnerable people look like, targets for Home Fire Safety Visits (HFSV) and what do HFSV interventions look like.
- How do we track and identify new risk groups and identify trends in incident types.
- Consideration of the risks associated with a changing climate.
- How can more prevention activity be undertaken with potentially fewer resources.
- Working more closely and in collaboration with our communities and local partners.
- Feeding back on the outcomes of prevention activity to the community.

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

How the 390 respondents answered this question is shown in the pie-chart below.

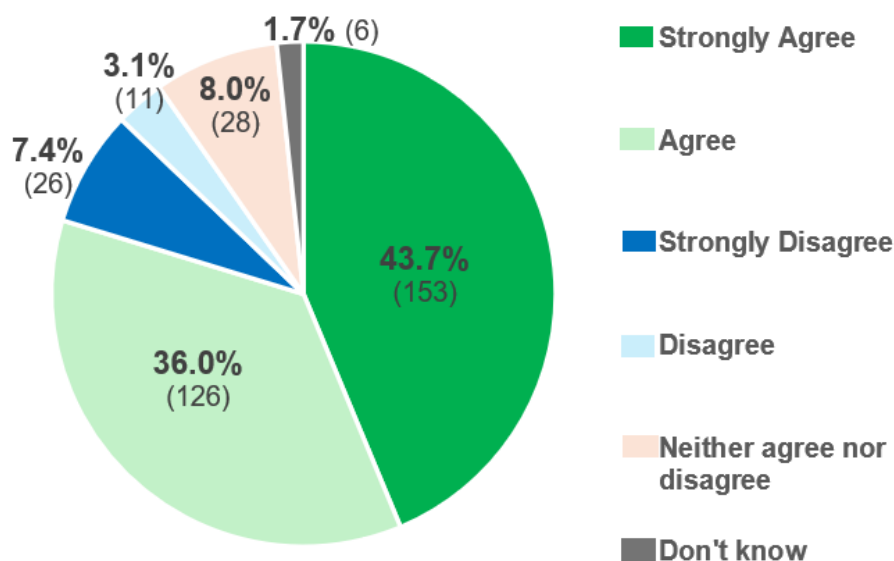


When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from our Protection objective, we received 39 comments which included:

- Increasing checks for commercial fire risk assessment compliance where possible.
- Impact of attending false alarms.
- Improved Local Resilience Forum collaborative working to support this.
- How can more protection activity be undertaken with potentially fewer resources.
- How do we engage entities that might not fall into traditional mainstream businesses.

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

How the 350 respondents answered this question is shown in the pie-chart below.



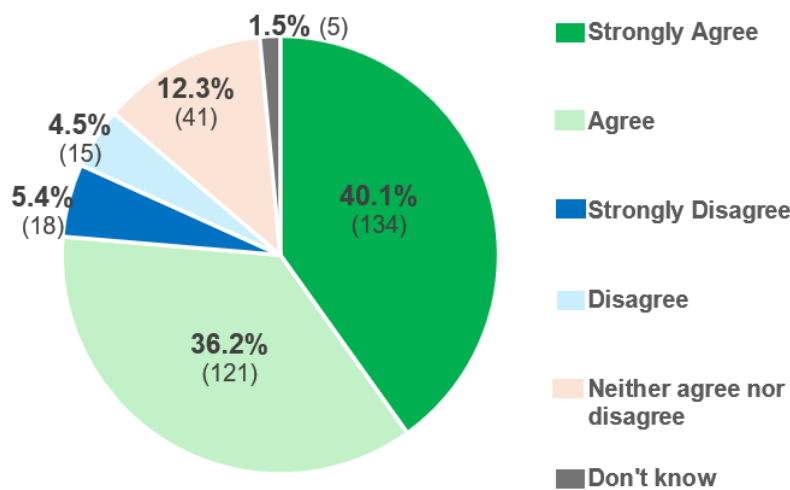
When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from our Response objective, we received 64 comments, which included:

- Greater proactivity in influencing local building developments.
- How do we provide an effective and safe response with potentially fewer resources.
- Working more closely and seamlessly with other emergency responders.
- Investing in on-call stations and recruitment.
- Questions regarding the Service's plans for medical response.
- More investment required in data analysis to support risk modelling.

Of the 64 comments relating to this objective, over half (37) of the comments were about the potential loss of 40 operational firefighter posts.

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

How the 334 respondents answered this question is shown in the pie-chart below.



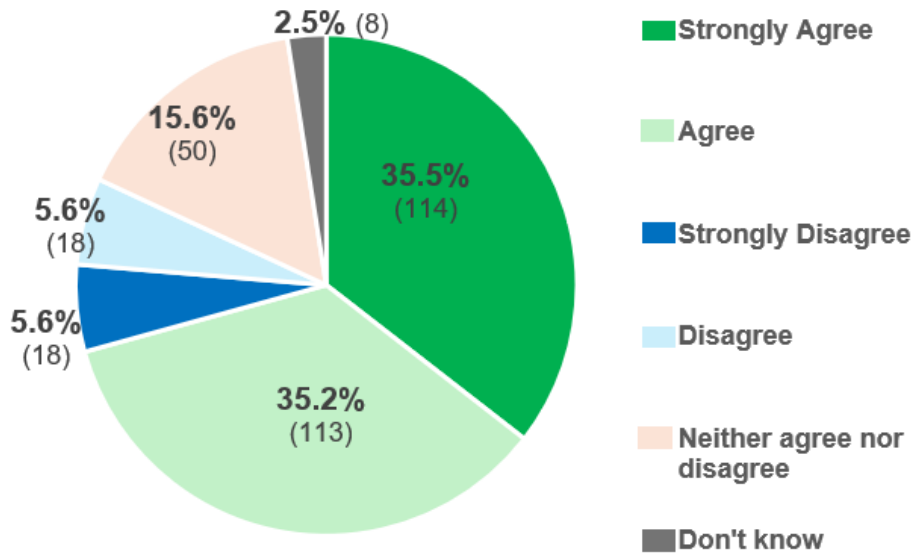
When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from our Resilience objective, we received 37 comments, which included:

- Resilience planning to be extended to flooding, heat waves and other climate impacts.
- Upskilling staff to the level of a police tactical medic.
- Considerations regarding recruitment to plan for the future.
- Working more closely with partners to further mitigate risks.
- Potential to consider the use of artificial intelligence to identify and mitigate risk.
- How do we ensure resilience with potentially fewer resources.
- Future proofing the Service's IT provision.

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

How the 321 respondents answered this question is shown in the following pie-chart.



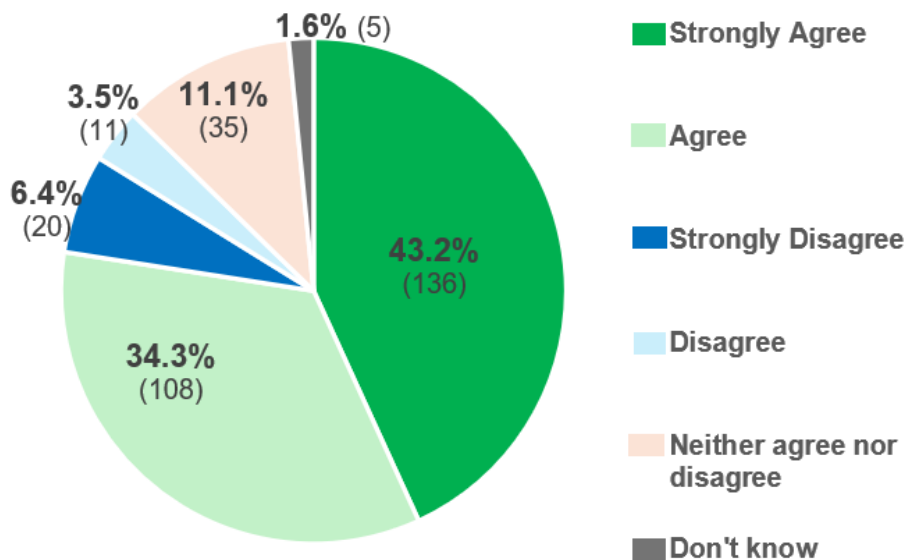


When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from Improving our Service objective, we received 44 comments, which included:

- Suggestion this objective should specifically address sexism and bullying.
- Smaller more responsive appliances to attend lower-level incidents.
- Total workforce sign-up and full commitment to diversity and integration.
- How do we effectively invest in improving our service with potentially fewer resources.
- Increased focus on IT with user experience underpinning decision making.

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

How the 315 respondents answered this question is shown in the pie-chart below.



When asked if it was felt that anything had been missed from Investing in our Staff objective, we received 59 comments, which included:

- Suggestion of including health monitoring to allow early detection of occupational illnesses.
- More investment in training and development.

- Adopting a behaviour-based approach to achieving compliance, driven by committed leadership.
- How do we capture the voices who are not replying to the survey.
- How do we invest in staff with potentially fewer resources.
- More diversification across the Service to be reflective of the community.

### **Q7 – Have you ever required the assistance of Avon Fire & Rescue Service?**

Of the 308 respondents who answered this question, the majority 70.5% (217 people) had not ever required the assistance of Avon Fire & Rescue Service.

Of those who have required the services of Avon Fire & Rescue Service, 65% (59 people) were very satisfied and 25% (23 people) were satisfied.

Of those who required the services of Avon Fire & Rescue Service, 5.5% (5 people) were dissatisfied and 3% (3 people) were very dissatisfied.

### **Q8 – The total cost of running Avon Fire & Rescue Service equates to approximately £36.50 a year (10p a day) per head of the population. How strongly do you agree or disagree that the Service provides good value for money?**

Of the 309 people who responded to this question, the majority (74.4%, 230 people) consider Avon Fire & Rescue Service good value for money.

### **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 2024/25 by 2.99% of our current precept?**

Of the 312 responses, 50% (156 people) strongly agree and 21.8% (68 people) agree they think it would be reasonable for Avon Fire & Rescue Service to consider increasing the precept. Of those total respondents, 6.7% (21 people) disagree and 6.4% (20 people) strongly disagree.

### **Q11 – Is there anything else you would like to add to your response?**

Of the 79 people who responded to this question, responses included:

- Comments on the proposals to reduce firefighter numbers/posts.
- Assistance provided regarding planning of new buildings and developing residential areas.
- Comment on the disproportionately of the council tax precept versus the cost of inflation.
- Criticism regarding the wrapping of fire engines.
- Investment into on-call.
- Calls for NFCC to be more vocal to the Government regarding funding.
- More joined up working across the Service and closer working with partners.
- Querying the effectiveness of the current governance model.
- Calls for fairer funding for the fire service in comparison to other emergency services.
- Thank you for all the hard work of AF&RS staff in keeping the community safe.

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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 2024-2028 draft objectives consultation.

Given the extent of our communication and engagement activity, it is acknowledged there has been a relatively low level of response to the consultation. This may be partly due to the nature and subject matter of the objectives, as well as despite people having views about Avon Fire & Rescue Service, they may not wish to take part in the consultation process. Anecdotal and verbal responses suggest a large proportion of the public *“just want the Service to be there when they need us”*.

Despite this, the results show that overall, the majority of people who responded to the survey support our objectives, agree with the risks identified, and agree with our actions to address local risk under our six overarching objectives.

We have listened, and continue to listen, to the concerns raised throughout the consultation process. In particular, regarding the proposed reduction to the number of firefighter posts. This concern was raised at an Avon Fire Authority finance meeting on 19 February 2024; however, the Service has a deficit of over £4million over the course of the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The Service’s full response to this concern can be read here: [Statement issued after Avon Fire Authority Meeting 19 February - Avon Fire & Rescue Service](#)

The feedback captured within the Service Plan consultation is being explored by our Community Risk Management Team and will be shared across the organisation to incorporate this into our Service strategies and team action plans which support and underpin the delivery of the Service Plan 2024-2028. Similarly, any feedback regarding the consultation process will be captured and considered in future consultation processes.