



Shropshire

Fire and Rescue Service



Communications Strategy 2016-2020



Putting Shropshire's
Safety First

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1. Introduction

Effective communication has never been more important for fire and rescue services than it is today.

The nature of the relationship between Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service and the communities it serves has changed markedly to become one that involves engaging with communities in a whole range of new ways.

Responding to emergencies is still at the heart of the Service but, increasingly, a modern fire and rescue service must also deliver against a much broader wellbeing and safeguarding agenda that aims to make communities safer and better places to live, work and do business.

Smart, targeted, creative communication is one of the most effective tools the Service can employ in delivering against that agenda.

Effective communication is vital in protecting and strengthening the Service's corporate reputation. The Service already enjoys a positive reputation. It is widely admired, respected and trusted, not least because of the unique relationship it has with communities across Shropshire. The people our firefighters serve are their friends and neighbours.

This strategy will demonstrate how we will use timely, accurate and accessible communication to give SFRS a trusted and authoritative voice in the communities it serves.

The Service's internal communications – the way we talk to, listen to and engage with our staff – will focus on providing staff with timely, accurate, accessible information. We will ensure that staff have regular opportunities to provide comment and feedback on communications issues.

This corporate communications strategy lays down the principles SFRS will follow in delivering that integrated, corporately branded communications.

The strategy covers a five year period but will be kept under review so that it can adapt to meet new and changing communications issues.

2. Audiences & Communication Aims

The Service's work impacts directly or indirectly upon every individual, organisation and business in Shropshire.

Whilst there are messages and information that the Service wants everyone to see and hear, there are many audience-specific messages that require targeted communications. In practical terms that means segmenting audiences in ways that ensure the right messages are reaching the right people.

Our audiences and the communications issues appropriate to them are:

a) Residents

- Make community safety information and advice readily available and accessible to all parts of the community including in alternative formats and languages.
- Improve interactive communication and consultation in order to provide residents with a voice in the development of services.

b) Business & Industry

- Strengthen and raise awareness of the “business continuity” message.
- Enhance engagement and involvement with businesses and professional bodies.
- Develop SFRS corporate reputation as THE primary source of business fire safety expertise and guidance and increase awareness and understanding of the Service's regulatory role.

c) Media

- Increase awareness and understanding of the Service's key messages.
- Develop strong, positive relationships with key media.
- Enhance, promote and protect corporate reputation.

d) Partner Organisations

- Develop and improve two-way communications with counterparts in partner organisations.
- Explore opportunities for collaborative working and resource sharing.

e) Employees

- Continue to further improve two-way communication through the continuing development of accessible platforms.
- Foster a sense of participation in and understanding of organisational and cultural change, corporate objectives and policies.
- Conduct regular Employee Engagement Surveys.

f) Vulnerable People and Hard to Reach Groups:

- Aim to make communications accessible to all through the use of differing formats and platforms.
- Consult with organisations and individuals representing the interests of hard to reach groups to identify communication best practice and adapt methodologies accordingly.

g) Influencers & Opinion Formers

- Promote corporate reputation and build awareness.
- Provide SFRS with a “voice” in the context of regional and national policy development.

3. External Communications

Communications techniques and tools have developed rapidly during the last decade and that trend shows no sign of slowing.

Whilst there is still a significant need for “traditional,” print-based communications – press releases, posters, banners, leaflets etc – online digital platforms, including social media, are now a fundamental part of the communications mix. Web, social media and digital tools provide speed, audience reach, inter-activity and monitoring capability on a scale and in ways that were once impossible.

SFRS’s social media strategy and objectives are dealt with later in this document and for the moment it should be made clear that the Service’s external communications will increasingly focus on digital platforms and methods.

The Service will, however, continue to recognise the value of more traditional communications methods, particularly when it comes to reaching the still sizeable groups that don’t have or don’t want to use technology platforms. SFRS will continue to employ those “traditional” communications methods alongside online and digital platforms.

3.1 Media Relations

SFRS currently enjoys excellent relationships with its target media and recognises the vital role the Press plays in disseminating SFRS news and information.

SFRS will continue to build and strengthen its media relationships.

SFRS's target media will be invited to take part in survey aimed at assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Service's media handling methods and performance.

The Service's contact with the Press falls into two broad categories: Incident-Related and General

- **Incident-Related**

Officers at the scene of incidents routinely provide the Press with comment and interviews and this policy will continue.

In the majority of instances this arrangement works quite well and this strategy proposes no major changes to a "system" that functions reasonably effectively. There are, however, some relatively minor changes to be introduced that will improve the way we handle Press calls and enquiries.

On-scene officers will continue to handle Press enquiries in exactly the way they always have. They should inform the CCO of the enquiry and their response as soon as is practicable.

- **General Enquiries**

All general Press enquiries should be directed to the CCO in the first instance. In the absence of the CCO, enquiries should be referred to the appropriate department manager and then, if necessary, directed to the Chief Fire Officer (CFO), Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) or Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO).

3.1.1 Actions to manage and improve Media Relations:

- All Press calls will be directed to the Corporate Communications Officer.
- In the CCO's absence Press calls will be directed to the appropriate head of department.
- Incident Commanders will continue to handle on-scene media enquiries and interviews and inform the CCO of the enquiry and response as soon as is practicable.
- All print and electronic media materials must conform to corporate branding guidelines.
- Protocols will be introduced and made available to all employees to ensure that media enquiries are dealt with appropriately.
- Any materials intended for distribution to the media (press releases, photographs, video) must be passed to the CCO for approval prior to distribution.
- A press releases template will be created and distributed across the Service.
- A Media Survey will be conducted to help assess SFRS communications performance.
- A media training programme will be developed and delivered.

3.2 SFRS Website

The website will be developed following consultation with all SFRS departments.

The website should be eye-catching, dynamic, easy to navigate and genuinely interactive: more than just a place to find information, but a website “shop window” that presents a positive image of SFRS to everyone who visits it.

The new site will include features such as video, audio and, importantly, user-generated content. It will also be linked directly to survey and consultation tools such as SurveyGizmo.

Consultation with departments will begin in January 2016.

3.3 Social Media Overview

The Service’s social media presence and activity will continue to be developed and expanded.

We will use social media to raise awareness of the Service’s corporate profile and understanding of its ever-changing role and corporate objectives.

We will also use social media to engage, involve and inform communities at a local fire station level.

3.3.1. Social Media: Whole-Time Fire Stations

Whole-time (full-time) fire stations will continue to be encouraged and supported in their continuing and expanding use of social media.

Responsibility for managing social media content (including content uploaded from each station’s “official” smartphone) will be clearly assigned to named individuals at each whole-time station.

Whole-time fire stations will continue to use their individual Facebook and Twitter accounts but each will be more clearly and prominently corporately branded.

3.3.2 Social Media: On-Call Fire Stations

A new system aimed at better managing, monitoring and expanding social media activity will be introduced across all on-call fire stations.

The Service's on-call fire stations currently have a mixture of official and unofficial social media accounts and pages with little or no corporate branding.

In order to introduce more consistent content and branding and to better manage and monitor social media content across all on-call fire stations, a programme of social media presentations and supporting packages will be developed and rolled out.

Social media “champions” will be identified at each on-call fire station and training, support and guidance will be provided.

On-call fire stations will be encouraged to achieve minimum monthly levels of social media activity – five tweets and five Facebook uploads per month – and activity will be logged by date and type of content on a ‘Fire Station Social Media Log’ managed by the CCO.

3.3.3. Social Media: Headquarters Departments

All headquarters departments will continue to use the Service's existing corporate social media accounts.

4. Brand and Corporate Identity

Every successful, high profile organisation has a strong and recognisable brand identity. Nike has its “swoosh,” McDonalds has its *M* and Lloyds Bank has its black horse.

Corporate branding is important because it helps to readily identify the organisation and goes some way towards reinforcing its values and its character. For branding to work properly the logo, the words attached to it, the size, colours and fonts must be consistent.

Currently different parts of the organisation sometimes design, produce and distribute materials lacking any consistent corporate branding.

In future all materials (letterheads, posters, promotional and campaigns material, signage, advertising, vehicle livery) whether used on the website and social media or printed and pushed through a letterbox, should be clearly and unambiguously branded.

Clear branding guidelines can be found on the Portal.

5. Internal Communications and Employee Engagement

SFRS is wholly committed to communicating openly and honestly with its staff and during the life of this strategy it will strive to find new ways of sharing information and opening two-way dialogue with all its employees.

The continuing development of the Portal (intranet) will focus on delivering and presenting information that is up to date, relevant and easily accessible.

Internal communication is especially important during periods of change and alterations to the way our staff work to deliver services. The IRMP is a case in point and throughout the planning and delivery of IRMP a programme of communications employing a variety of methods will be used to explain as clearly as possible its purpose and its implications for members of staff.

The Service Transformation Programme, which includes IRMP activities, will include regular and updated information on the Portal, team briefings, video blogs and staff surveys.

5.1 Actions to Improve Internal Communications & Employee Engagement

- Following the creation of the new Portal (intranet) and as part of its ongoing development, conduct consultation involving all departments to identify improvements, new features and functionality.
- Conduct a staff attitude survey to identify wider internal communications issues and solutions.
- Establish an “Internal Communications Watchdog” as a focal point for the continuing development and improvement of internal communications. The ICW team would also receive and respond to a new Portal-hosted suggestion box.
- The Pink: A complete re-design of The Pink and its launch as an e-newsletter available on the Portal. The re-design will focus on improving editorial quality and content and the introduction of new features including photographs, video, readers’ letters, guest blogs, competitions and news in brief from fire stations.
- Conduct regular employee engagement surveys and polls.

6. Other Communications Issues

6.1 Photography & Video: Overview

Stills photography and video is being increasingly used by modern fire services for a variety of reasons:

- it can provide valuable information and a record during and after incidents
- it can provide fire investigation officers with evidential material
- it can be a valuable source of media coverage across all platforms
- it can add punch and dynamism to fire safety and other campaigns

However, unlike the written word – a press release for example – some photography and video, especially any that involves people or private property, requires certain permissions and safeguards to be applied before the images are taken and distributed.

Whenever possible, prior permission should always be sought from the people or the property owner.

Whilst the law permits photography or video of people in circumstances where “they have no reasonable expectation of privacy” – photographs or video taken in a public place for example – images produced without permission are not advised.

6.2 Actions to Improve Photography & Video Production Procedures

- The introduction of a policy requiring employees to seek prior written or verbal permissions before shooting still or video images.
- Requests to commission external contractors will be directed to the CCO.
- The creation of a digital library, accessible via the Portal, for the capture and storage of all stills, video and audio files. The CCO and IT will liaise to determine the most appropriate digital platform.
- Copyright, trademark and intellectual property checks to be carried out prior to the use of music, graphics and video.
- A procedure for sourcing and contracting videography support for a range of uses will be developed.

6.3 Materials for External Distribution

A number of departments routinely produce promotional and campaign materials in the form of leaflets, banners, flyers, posters and advertisements.

It is perfectly sensible that this should continue but, in order to ensure brand and corporate consistency across all materials, there is a need for oversight of all such materials.

This should also include materials external suppliers may be invited to provide. Improvements and additions to internal design and production resources (CCO and apprentice Graphics Officer) provide departments with a degree of in-house capability.

6.4 Actions to Improve the Production and Oversight of External Materials

- All materials (printed, online and digital) to be overseen and sanctioned by the CCO prior to production or distribution.
- Any requirement for the production of materials should be directed to the CCO in the first instance in order to determine whether they can be produced in-house.

7. Equality & Diversity

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is committed to embracing the principles of equality and diversity. All aspects of its corporate communications output and activity will put equality & diversity principles at the heart of its communications work as part of its determination to make its communications inclusive and accessible to all.

The communications team will work closely with the Equality & Diversity department to identify improvements and changes that ensure the SFRS's equality and diversity agenda is met and fresh opportunities to promote its commitment are identified and exploited. A bi-annual communications plan will be created.

The communications team will work with E & D to create communications available in a range of formats and languages.

8. Communication Evaluation & Monitoring

Our corporate communications will be evaluated in a way that measures their effectiveness and identifies areas for improvement or change. Effective evaluation will also be vital in reviewing and re-aligning the Service's communications focus in response to change.

Findings and results from the first tranche of surveys will provide benchmarks that will be used to set key performance indicators.

A range of methods will be employed to measure communication outputs and outcomes.

8.1 Actions to Improve Communications Evaluation

- External Communication Surveys/Polls
- Feedback/Followers on SFRS Social Media Platforms
- Website Traffic and Feedback
- Media Satisfaction Surveys
- Targeted Surveys of Specific Campaigns (eg business fire safety campaigns)
- Staff Surveys and Polls
- Focus Groups
- Portal-hosted Staff Suggestion “Box”

9. Summary

Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service is working within a constantly changing political, economic, social and cultural environment and is itself adapting to that constantly changing landscape.

It is against that backdrop that SFRS must strive to inform and engage with Shropshire's residents and businesses. That demands a clear voice, a trusted and respected voice and a reputation that vividly demonstrates a willingness to listen and engage with every section of the Shropshire community.

Like every other part of the landscape the Service finds itself operating in, its communications focus will also have to respond to change. This document serves as a point of reference but it is not a practical, day to day tool. Instead, a number of brief "bullet-point" extracts have been drawn from it that are aimed at providing employees with easy-to-access guidance on key aspects of the corporate communications strategy.

These extracts will enable our staff to find answers to some of the communications issues and queries they routinely face. These bullet-point extracts, like the corporate communications strategy itself, will be regularly reviewed and updated to take account of change.

Action Plan

We will:	Person Responsible	Target Date
External Communications		
Survey local media (print, online & broadcast) to establish best practice	CCO	April 2016
Survey residents to measure current communications performance and identify preferred comms platforms	CCO	Aug 2016 annually
Review current media handling arrangements and create Media Handling Protocols	CCO	Mar 2016
Produce a comprehensive 'Communications Calendar'	CCO/DJ	May 2016
From the above, devise annual communications actions plans for BFS/CFS/E & D	CCO	2016 onwards
Create website development team	CCO/GE	Jan 2016
Conduct website consultation with internal departments	Web Team	Feb/Mar 2016
Develop and launch new website	Web Team	Aug 2016
Develop a plan for featuring communications messages on SFRS vehicles	CCO/DJ	Ongoing
Develop plans and methodologies for public consultation and engagement projects	CCO/DJ	Sept 2015
Develop Media Training Programme	CCO	June 2016
Internal Communications		
Conduct Annual Employee Engagement & Internal Communications Survey	CCO/HR/DJ	May 2016
Conduct twice-yearly Employee Polls via the Portal and publish the results	CCO	Oct 2016
Replace the Pink with a new, completely re-designed digital version available on the Portal and the new SFRS website (via a new "Members" tab)	CCO	August 2017
Provide employees with regular Change Programme updates and bulletins via Portal forums	CCO/GE/AJ	Ongoing

Create and maintain a digital image capture and storage library.	CCO/DJ	Ongoing
Develop a policy for sourcing and contracting videography for a range of uses	CCO	April 2016
Social Media		
Develop social media presentations and support packs for all on-call fire stations	CCO/DJ	Sept 2016
Introduce system requiring all fire stations to attain minimum level of monthly social media activity. Create a 'Fire Station Social Media Log' to track activity.	CCO	Oct 2016
Identify social media "champions" at all fire stations and provide guidance on new social media procedure	CCO	Feb 2017
Produce bi-annual social media monitoring and performance report	CCO/DJ	Mar 2017 onwards
Equality & Diversity		
Produce bi-annual communications plan for Equality & Diversity	CCO/E&D	April 2016 onwards
Develop communications materials in a range of formats and languages		Feb 2017
Brand & Corporate Identity		
Conduct a review of existing corporate identity guidelines and their application across SFRS	CCO/DJ	May 2018
Produce a Corporate Identity Handbook to provide all employees with clear guidelines	CCO/DJ	July 2018