



Consultation Strategy

2023 - 2027





Contents

»»	Strategic Intent	3
»»	Strategic Context	3
»»	Governance	4
»»	Guiding Principles	4
»»	Delivering Effective Consultations	5
	Early Engagement and Options Development	6
	Consultation Planning	6
	Consultation Methods	7
	Consultation Materials	8
	Analysis and Feedback of Consultation Findings	8
	Consultation Decision	8
	Data Protection and Retention	9
»»	Equality and Diversity	9
»»	Consultation Evaluation	11
»»	Approval	11

If you need this document in a different format, you can reach us at consultations@rbfrs.co.uk or call us on 0118 945 2888 with details of the request and your contact information. Alternatively, send it to us in the post addressed to Consultations, Newsham Court, Pincents Kiln, Calcot, Reading RG31 7SD.

We will consider the request and get back to you within 20 working days.

For more information on accessibility at Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, please read our [Accessibility Statement](#).



Strategic Intent

Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA) is required by the [Fire and Rescue National Framework 2018](#) to be transparent and accountable to communities for their decisions and actions and to; provide the opportunity for communities to help plan their local service through effective consultation and involvement.

This strategy, which has been prepared with support from [The Consultation Institute](#), highlights how our consultation and engagement activities will support this objective, be effectively planned, and will be based on corporate standards and basic principles. These will provide a consistent approach to consultation and engagement across Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service (RBFRS).

It outlines how RBFRS will use consultation in a proportionate and effective way. Ensuring this process can assist in decision making to improve the service we provide to the communities of Royal Berkshire.

RBFRS aims to adhere to good practice and engage in effective and consistent consultations with all stakeholders in line with the [Royal Berkshire Fire Authority's key strategic commitments](#).

In consulting, our aim is to draw on the views of our stakeholders internally and externally to ensure that the needs and opinions of local people and staff groups are represented where possible to ensure that decisions taken are better aligned to the needs and requirements of our communities.

Outcomes of consultation will be used to inform policy and decision making, to help shape and improve services related to our Community Risk Management Plan and other service change proposals, improve public understanding and keep our residents and stakeholders informed of progress.

Broader engagement good practice will be covered in our Communications and Engagement Strategy.

Strategic Context

Consultation is defined as the 'dynamic process of dialogue between individuals or groups, based upon a genuine exchange of views, with the objective of influencing decisions, policies or programmes of action'. It is a specific, defined process that lasts for a set period of time and is distinct from other ongoing engagement activities that RBFRS may undertake, internally or externally.

RBFRS recognises that it is important to encourage participation with staff and stakeholders outside the organisation in consultations where proposals are likely to result in changes/alterations



to our service to the public. Whilst focus is on consultation, RBFRS will consider the use of pre-engagement to help frame options for consideration.

RBFRS will seek to understand, evaluate and consider the views of our communities and staff when making such decisions. This strategy will not cover our operational engagement on a day to day basis during the delivery of our services.

Governance

Public consultation should always be undertaken with a clear governance structure in place. In this regard, all public consultations undertaken by RBFRS will be approved by the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority.

An internal Sponsor will be identified and accountable to ensure the consultation is completed according to good practice, pending type of consultation.

During consultation, specific review points will be scheduled by the consultation team to review progress against plan and where required to agree any changes/mitigations which are required.

The feedback and consultation outcome will always be presented to Royal Berkshire Fire Authority for conscientious consideration ahead of any decision being made. To support transparency of decision making, all consultation documents, supporting information, feedback reports and decision outcomes will be published on the RBFRS website.

Guiding Principles

We previously consulted on our consultation principles in October 2018 and depending on the nature of the proposals we planned to take forward we set out the following principles for consultation:

- For Public Consultation: We will consult with a wide range of stakeholders, including the public on any changes, which are high level issues that have a material impact on the performance of the services we provide, in accordance with our Consultation Strategy. In carrying out a public consultation, RBFRS aims to follow the four Gunning Principles which specify how public bodies should consult. These specify that:
 1. Consultation should be carried out when proposals are at the formative stage
 2. Sufficient information is provided to allow intelligent consideration of the proposals
 3. Adequate time is given for response
 4. Responses are conscientiously taken into account before decisions are taken



These principles have not changed and depending on the nature of the proposals we are planning to take forward, we will also adhere to the [2018 consultation principles guidance](#) published by the Government. RBFRS understands the importance of following good practice principles in consultation and having consideration of the legal framework for public consultation.

These give clear guidance on good practice consultations and our consultation principles outlined in this strategy have been considered including:

- ✓ Consultations will be clear and concise
- ✓ Consultations will have a purpose
- ✓ Consultation will be informative
- ✓ Consultations are only part of a process of engagement
- ✓ Consultations should last for a proportionate amount of time
- ✓ Consultations should be targeted
- ✓ Consultations should take account of the groups being consulted
- ✓ Consultations should be agreed before publication
- ✓ Consultations should facilitate scrutiny
- ✓ Responses should be published in a timely fashion; and

We will also consider appropriate times to launch consultations

RBFRS has also considered the Consultation Institute good practice principles published in [the Consultation Charter](#) and guidance published by the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) which provides practical guidance on [stakeholder and public engagement](#).

By observing these principles, RBFRS wishes to demonstrate its commitment to good practice and to assisting people to participate fully in any consultations.

RBFRS may decide to engage internally, with our staff and/or trade unions, when proposed changes do not materially affect the service provided to the public. This is in line with agreed policies and procedures.

Delivering Effective Consultations

This section will consider a series of operational aspects in more detail covering the three major stages of the consultation process, preparing for consultation, delivery and post-consultation.



Early Engagement and Options Development

As preparation for public consultation, RBFRS will always consider undertaking a period of initial engagement with key stakeholders and impacted groups to understand issues of concern regarding proposals and to help shape proposals and ideas for addressing the challenges faced, and if required, to appraise options.

In line with good practice, involvement should focus on representatives from groups most likely impacted by particular proposals and/or specific categories for example, protected characteristic groups, where RBFRS is keen to understand views on, for example, equalities issues.

If this is to take place, the consultation team will factor in a period of pre-engagement into plans before formal consultation takes place.

Consultation Planning

For every public consultation conducted, RBFRS will develop a project plan that will consider undertaking the following activities:

- ✓ Defining the objectives and purpose of the consultation;
- ✓ Undertaking stakeholder mapping and key audience identification to support the planning and targeting of consultation activities;
- ✓ Conduct a phase of initial engagement before a public consultation to identify key issues and support options development;
- ✓ Development of Equality Impact Assessments (EIA)
- ✓ Communications planning to target different communities, and ensure that equalities impacts are understood;
- ✓ Accessibility and format of consultation materials;
- ✓ The overall timescales for public consultation, taking into account any public holidays, religious festivals or political election dates;
- ✓ Allocation of sufficient staff and resource to ensure effective delivery;
- ✓ Robust analysis and reporting of consultation findings to support integrity and transparency of the consultation;



- ✓ Activities required ahead of decision making, including the requirements of Public Sector Equality Duty;
- ✓ Definition and agreement of key metrics e.g. number of respondents; and
- ✓ Definition of key milestones for approvals and decision making, such as senior management meetings, deadlines for reporting to the Fire Authority

Our approach to consultation will take into consideration the need to be reflective of good practices regarding sustainability.

Consultation Methods

We will consult widely across our communities and in a variety of ways to ensure we understand the needs and views of local communities. RBFRS recognises that it serves diverse communities which all have different needs and may prefer to engage using different approaches. Wherever feasible RBFRS commits to use a variety of methods to encourage engagement and to ensure accessibility.

An equality impact assessment (EIA) will be created to support options development and used to identify the impacts of proposed policies, decisions and activities on relevant groups, including those with protected characteristics. An EIA will also be created to support the consultation and will consider methods and accessibility. As part of this strategy, RBFRS will look to trial innovative ways of engaging and evaluate each approach to understand the effectiveness of them. This will include a trial use of a Community Panel, focus groups and workshops alongside our continued use of surveys.

Our response mechanisms will comply with web content accessibility guidelines. We aim to use plain English, and where possible, ensure technical compatibility with assistive technologies. Our [accessibility statement](#) is published on our website.

Where appropriate, the consultation EIA and information on community profiles will help identify where we should consider translation into the most common languages within community areas and where our documents should be available in assistive formats such as easy read (see later section on Equalities).

Our Communications and Engagement Strategy will support raising awareness of and increasing engagement for our consultations. Details of public consultations will be published on our website, together with details on how our communities can participate and sign up to our consultation mailing list and the consultation outcomes.

Where proposed changes solely impact RBFRS staff, in line with existing policies and procedures, internal engagement will take place enabling views to be provided for consideration prior to a decision being made. Where relevant, decisions will be publicised in RBFRS internal communication channels. Any changes to controlled documents should follow the guidelines as set out in the [Document Management Policy and Procedures policy](#).



Consultation Materials

Information will be provided to explain our proposed changes. In line with governance procedures, public consultation materials will be considered and agreed by Senior Leadership Team and the Fire Authority before publication. Material containing detailed information for consideration during a public consultation will be prepared in a clear and concise and accessible manner. The option to request alternative formats is available. Materials will be jargon-light where possible.

Stakeholders should be given enough information to make an intelligent consideration of proposed changes. Public Consultation material will be agreed by senior management and the Fire Authority before publication.

Materials supporting our communications will be prepared in accordance with our Communications and Engagement Strategy. An EIA developed for each consultation will help inform any additional accessible formats or approaches.

Analysis and Feedback of Consultation Findings

Once the consultation period has come to an end, the data collected will be analysed and summarised as consultation findings. Depending on the proposal and resourcing needs, as part of the consultation planning a decision will be made on whether this analysis is completed internally or if it is more appropriate to use external/independent analysis.

RBFRS will consider the appropriate method to feedback consultation findings, in line with stakeholder needs. A report detailing a summary of findings will normally be released to the public domain, within 12 weeks of a consultation closing, for a period of consideration ahead of any decision making. Such publication will be made clear to stakeholders when the findings are released.

Feedback will be available in accessible formats where appropriate in line with actions identified as a result of the consultation EIA.

For data collected as part of an internal engagement activity, feedback will be reviewed, analysed and the outcomes cascaded and published in the relevant internal communication channels.

Consultation Decision

The outcomes of the public consultations will be conscientiously considered by the Royal Berkshire Fire Authority and information presented at a relevant committee meeting before any decision is made.

Decision making will be undertaken in line with Governance requirements. Final decisions and justification of the outcomes will be released to the public following a period of decision making.



Where feedback and suggestions from stakeholders have been considered, but disregarded, justification for this decision will be explained clearly by RBFA.

Consultation findings will be published in a timely manner and provide sufficient time for decision makers to consider the findings ahead of any decisions made.

Any outcomes of internal engagement will be published on our intranet and cascaded in line with our Communications and Engagement Strategy.

Data Protection and Retention

RBFRS will use a variety of mechanisms to host surveys and responses to consultations. We propose to collect certain data for analysis purpose but will remain compliant with the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA), and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR). Assurance processes will be followed to ensure any data is anonymised.

RBFRS will ask demographic questions to gather information on our respondents. Provision of this demographic information is voluntary and further information on how we manage this data and our privacy notices can be found on our [website](#).

We will only retain data for as long as needed for the purpose of the consultation.

Equality and Diversity

The Equality Act 2010 places a statutory obligation on public authorities to comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This requires public authorities to consider how our policies, decisions and activities affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. The relevant protected characteristics, as outlined in S. 149, are:

- ✓ Age;
- ✓ Disability;
- ✓ Gender reassignment;
- ✓ Pregnancy and maternity;
- ✓ Race;
- ✓ Religion or belief;
- ✓ Sex;
- ✓ Sexual orientation.



To meet these statutory obligations, we must have due regard to the need to

- ✓ Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act;
- ✓ Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not; and
- ✓ Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

S.149 also instructs how inequalities affecting these eight characteristics should be analysed, in relation to the development, service change or project which is being considered. This requires the public body to consider if the changes proposed affect or could affect individuals who have protected characteristics through:

- ✓ Discrimination;
- ✓ Harassment;
- ✓ Victimisation;
- ✓ Disadvantage - which decision makers must aim to remove or minimise;
- ✓ Differing needs - decision makers must seek to ensure differing needs are catered for);
- ✓ Differing disabilities - decision makers must seek to ensure peoples' differing disabilities are considered; or
- ✓ Prejudice - that might affect the quality of their lives in relation to the development, service or project engaged upon.

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is the mechanism that RBFPS will use to identify the impacts of proposed policies, decisions and activities on protected characteristics groups. RBFPS commits to developing an EIA for options development and a separate EIA to support the consultation with rigour in line with the [Bracking Principles](#).

The consultation EIA will be published alongside any consultation materials and invite feedback on the initial assessment made to ensure that a robust summary is available of any potential impacts with appropriate mitigations identified as required.

A final version of the options development EIA will support decision makers in meeting their duty of 'due regard' as required in by the Public Sector Equality Duty outlined in the legislation.



Consultation Evaluation

Following the end of any engagement or consultation period RBFRS commits to undertake an evaluation of the activities undertaken, review agreed key metrics and the equality impact assessment. This is to promote ongoing learning and development, and ensure that future activities are improved where required. The consultation team will take time together to review and evaluate the consultation process using key metrics and outcomes.

Consultation reviews should be completed at mid-points, following consultation closure and following final decision and feedback.

These will reflect on the following considerations, in order to continually improve our process of engagement and consultation with the communities of Royal Berkshire:

- ✓ What worked well?
- ✓ What didn't work well?
- ✓ Areas for improvement
- ✓ Resources needed for the future
- ✓ Next steps

This reflection will be documented and any changes as a result will be built into action plans and future consultations where relevant.

Approval

This document was approved by the Senior Leadership Team in December 2022.

ROYAL BERKSHIRE
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

-  RoyalBerksFRS
-  @RBFRSOfficial
-  RoyalBerkshireFire
-  Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
-  rbfrs.co.uk