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| **Classification** | **Official (Sensitive- Commercial)** |
| **Meeting** | **Strategic Board**  | **Agenda no.** | **17** |
| **Meeting Date** | **16 March 2023** |
| **Report Authors:** | **Emily Cheyne** |
| **Presented By** | **Emily Cheyne** |
| **Subject** | **Public and Partner perception study**  |
| **Type of Report:** | **Decision** |
| **Action Point No.** | **N/A** | **For Publication** | **No** |

# Recommendations

* Members of the Strategic Board are asked to review the report and agree to conducting a public and partner perception study and workshops that reach our harder to reach communities (option three)
* If agreed, to seek approval for the allocation of funds to work with a social research organisation on a two-year contract, with option to extend

# executive summary

Our aim is to become one of the best fire and rescue services in the country. To be this we need to engage with our communities and our partners. Gathering data on public and partner views and experiences of ECFRS provides valuable insight, and this feedback will:

* Shape our communication and engagement activities
* Shape our community and partnership engagement activities
* Help inform our new community risk management plan (CRMP) activities and planning
* Give us a better understanding and insight into specific community risks
* Provide links to create relationships and contacts with harder to reach communities

We know that perception surveys could be a valuable tool to measure public and partner views and experiences of Essex County Fire and Rescue Service. It will also provide insight into the reasons and drivers of views and perceptions. Additionally, it will help us to understand risk factors across our various and diverse communities and provide a route to reach and engage with our harder to reach communities.

# Background

To date we have conducted an external communications survey and have data from the HMICFRS public perception surveys. The feedback and audience led insight has helped to shape our communication plan and strategies.

In May 2022, SLT agreed to a two-phase perception survey approach. This involved designing, developing, and delivering a marketing and communication campaign, improving the knowledge of our public and partners as to what the role of a modern fire and rescue service is (#WeAreEssexFire).

**#WeAreEssexFire**

The Service started using the hashtag #WeAreEssexFire in summer 2022. It launched alongside a video and press release detailing how our Service spreads resources across the county to make sure the right response reaches our communities in an emergency. The focus was to share with our partners and public the full spectrum and role of a modern-day fire and rescue service.

This timing coincided with our busiest season on record. With everyone in the Service pulling together to keep fire engines available and push prevention messages out the idea was to create a sense of belonging. It was also a chance to continue to challenge outdated stereotypes of what our Service does by teaming the hashtag with a wide range of activities and people.

We used the hashtag over 100 times across our social media channels throughout the summer and into autumn. Our people used the hashtag and backed the campaign, and through Essex Communications Group, our local councils and health trusts also used the campaign hashtag alongside safety messages.

# OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS

**Option 1**

Following the #WeAreEssexFire campaign, now do nothing – do not check in with public and partners and do not conduct a perception survey. Not advisable. Engaging with our public and partners increases satisfaction, helps inform strategies and improves reputation and our employer brand.

**Option 2**

Conduct a perception survey “in-house”. This will be managed internally by the corporate communications department and will not use an external provider. There will be resourcing implications, and the delivery will not be to the same scale/ specification as the external provider. (see option 3 specification). This option will only allow us to measure public views. It will not enable us to understand the risk factors across our more diverse communities.

In-house offer:

* Campaign/ survey will run for three weeks
* Polls across social media channels
* Partnership engagement
* Integrated approach – digital and accessible/ paper based

Risk – cannot guarantee all demographics will be reached/ represented. Data won’t have the same level of scrutiny and interpretation. Data will not be “statistically valid” and corroborated.

**Option 3**

To seek allocation of up to approx. £84,000\* over two years (£41,000 per year) to use a social research agency.

Using the social research agency will allow us to measure public views, as well as engage with our harder to reach and more diverse communities – understanding their risks and needs.

The social research agency engages with communities for 12 consecutive months, then the findings are reviewed, and then engages for an additional 12 months. This ensures the data is valid and reliable.

The social research agency will:

* Ensure they reach and engage with at least 8,000 people over 12 months – to ensure that the data is statistically valid
* Use several methods (telephone survey, digital, workshops, interviews) to engage with and reach the communities we specifically ask them to reach
* Provide headlines throughout the 12-month data collection period
* Reach a representation of our communities across Greater Essex, including those groups and communities who we have little or no interaction with

Suggested specification for the survey provider:

* An electronic version of the raw data allowing bespoke analysis and interrogation
* Descriptive analysis of the results presented in an easily understood and accessible way
* Results available and presented on a quarterly basis and analysed at a county and command group level (four areas)
* Quarterly reports that are clearly presented in an easy-to-understand format and accessible and relevant to a range of senior stakeholders. Quarterly reports are to include:
	+ A presentation of quantitative results
	+ A presentation and visualisation of descriptive statistics including geographic or demographic variations and trends

*\* Anticipated/ predicted costs based on research and agency that PFCC and Essex police have commissioned previously, although it is recognised that a tender process will need to be put in place. It is anticipated that OPFCC will fund 50% of the entire costs (approx. £167,200 over two years)*

**Timelines and next steps**

Suggested to set up a workshop to finalise the questions we’ll look to set and define the problem we’re looking to solve. For example – measure public confidence, measure public understanding, understand how risk varies across different demographics and communities.

Workshop suggested attendees: communications, group managers across the four commands, PFCC representative, data team, prevention, protection, and response.

Procurement and tender process to start. Timelines for this to be brought back to SLT for information and update.

Formal agreement from OPFCC to fund 50%.

# risks and mitigations

* Timing of survey and risk of industrial action. This could potentially affect uptake and responses and affect sentiment. Mitigation – the survey will run for 12 consecutive months.
* Use of spending and current budget pressures – reputational issue regarding use of money. Suggestion of 50% funding from the OPFCC. This is more than a survey, and helps us reach our hardest to reach communities, and will input into the CRMP work also.

# LINKS TO FIRE AND RESCUE PLAN

The proposal supports all the Fire and Rescue Plan priorities, plus will seek to support and inform the consultation for the next Fire and Rescue Plan.

* Prevention, protection, and response
* Improve the safety on our roads
* Help the vulnerable stay safe
* Promote a positive culture in the workplace
* Develop and broaden the roles and range of activities undertaken by the Service
* Be transparent, open, and accessible
* Collaborate with our partners
* Make best use of our resources

# Financial Implications

Budget to be sourced to use external provider. Anticipated that OPFCC will fund 50% of the entire cost - based on Essex Police model.

It is assumed (based on research and previous contracts with Essex Police and OPFCC), that the full value of the contract is likely to be approx. £170,000. The costs will be split equally between ECFRS and PFCC.

# Legal ImplicationS

Procurement will manage and advise against any contractual arrangements that need to be put in place.

# Staffing Implications

Procurement to support tender process – if applicable

Communications team – to manage survey agency – if applicable

Communications team to deliver “in-house” model – if applicable

# Equality and Diversity Implications

We have considered whether individuals with protected *characteristics will be disadvantaged as a consequence of the actions being taken. Due regard has also been given to whether there is impact on each of the following protected groups as defined within the Equality Act 2010*:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Race | N | Religion or belief | N |
| Sex | N | Gender reassignment  | N |
| Age | N | Pregnancy & maternity | N |
| Disability | N | Marriage and Civil Partnership | N |
| Sexual orientation | N |  |  |

The proposal seeks to gain the views of Essex public and partners. Protected characteristics will not be disadvantaged.

The external survey provider will engage a representative sample of the public of Essex. A representative sample includes but is not limited to:

* Clear demographic and geographic representation of the landscape of Essex.
* Traditionally less heard groups such as ethnic minorities, and those with disabilities (physical, learning, and sensory)

The Core Code of Ethics Fire Standard has been fully considered and incorporated into the proposals outlined in this paper.

# Health and safety implications

None identified

# consultation and Engagement

This survey (whether in-house or through an agency) will be consultative in approach and engage with audiences across the county. Those audiences will then be more informed when we consult on the Fire and Rescue Plan, and the Community Risk Management Plan.

# future plans

The results will provide additional data regarding our communities, help shape our CRMP work. Through procurement, it’s suggested that we look to have the option to extend the contract for a further 12-24 months (at the same rate/ fixed price). This could help inform the CRMP delivery and the fire and rescue plan.

# List of background papers and appendices

Appendix A – Corporate Communications strategy 2022

Appendix B – HMICFRS public perception survey 2021

Appendix C – HMICFRS public perception survey 2019

<https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/public-perceptions-of-frs-survey-data-2019.csv>