TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

MEETING: 15 SEPTEMBER 2008

SUBJECT: COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY: - EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY AND FINANCE OFFICER.

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

1.1   The purpose of this report is to outline, for the information of Members, the Authority's External Communications Strategy, which will supplement the Staff Communications Strategy that is already in place.

2. **BACKGROUND**

2.1   Over the last five years the fire and rescue service nationally has experienced significant organisational change as part of the modernisation and reform process. In order to ensure that these changes are communicated effectively it is important to ensure that fire and rescue services have in place an effective communications framework, both internally and externally.

2.2   Acknowledging this fact, the first priority of this service was to develop the internal communications structure with staff in order to address the issues arising out of the Staff Survey undertaken in 2006. This internal Communications Strategy was duly reported to Members on 18th December 2006 (Minute 82/2006 refers). Further to this, significant improvements in the area of internal communications have now been made and have been acknowledged in recent reports.

2.3   Following on from the development and implementation of the internal communications strategy the focus moved to the need to develop the Authority's external communications. As Members will recall, the first stage of this process was the appointment of an external communications officer, as approved at the Authority meeting held on the 31 March 2008 (Minute 2008/110 refers) and who now has the responsibility for the development and co-ordination of the Authority's external communications policies and processes. In support of this an External Communications Strategy, together with an accompanying action plan, has been produced and published on the internet and intranet. The key action points are outlined below.

3   **EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY**

3.1   The External Communications Strategy covers the following main action points which are intended to:

- Improve communications with 'hard to reach' groups

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- Ensure attendance at key partnership meetings
- Identify and target key stakeholders, including promoting TWFRA's strategy, plans and performance to stakeholders
- Carry out a comprehensive website review
- Attend key community shows/events
- Develop a strategic approach to proactive media relations
- Carry out media training for senior and middle managers in key operational and corporate roles
- Review out of hours media handling

3.2   The Chief Fire Officer can report that significant progress has already been made with regard to developing external communications, in line with the strategy document, and these developments include the following:

- Membership of four out of the five Local Strategic Partnerships
- Clearer communication as a result of the move to co-terminosity, reflecting the boundaries of the constituent local authorities
- Appointment of Station Managers to support District Managers in attending key partnership meetings and engaging in key partnership work
- Appointment of three community advocates
- Proactive, planned approach to external media relations
- Media briefings with the Chief Fire Officer

4.   CONSULTATION ON THE STRATEGY

4.1   The strategy has been developed in response to the views of members of the public, businesses and stakeholders who were consulted during several audits carried out from 2006 to date.

4.2   In addition, the Strategic Management Team, departmental heads, station managers, district managers, prevention and education managers, community safety advocates and diversity and equality staff were consulted on the Strategy during April 2008. Members of the Strategic Communications Group, responsible for overseeing developments in communications, were also consulted. Ten responses to the consultation were received and have been taken into account in the Strategy where appropriate.

5.   LINK TO THE STRATEGIC COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN 2008/2013

5.1   The Staff Communications Strategy helps to underpin the Strategic Community Safety Plan.

5.2   The Authority's Strategic Community Safety Plan 2008/2013 states that in achieving its objectives the Service must ensure it:

- is well managed
- aims for excellence in service provision taking account of stakeholders views, and
- works in effective partnership with the communities it represents, and external organisations

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Effective communication is an essential element in making all of these happen. It also plays a key role in achieving the Service's strategic goals and organisational objectives, specifically through informing and educating:

- To prevent loss of life and injury from fires and other emergencies (Strategic Goal 1),
- To respond appropriately to the risk (Strategic Goal 2)
- To plan and prepare for exceptional events (Strategic Goal 3)
- To deliver a modern effective service, ensuring value for money (Strategic Goal 4)

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1   Provision has been made for the implementation of this Strategy within the revenue budget for 2008/2009 and will be included in the revenue estimates for 2009/2010. The financial implications associated with the introduction of the External Communications Strategy are primarily associated with the external publicity material.

8. EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

8.1   Equality and fairness issues are addressed in the External Communications Strategy and an Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1   The Authority is recommended to:

a) Endorse the publication of the External Communications Strategy and

b) receive further reports as appropriate

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The undermentioned Background Paper refers to the subject matter of the above report:

- Staff Communications Strategy, 2006-09, August 2006
- External Communications Strategy, 2008-2011, May 2008

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