HUMBERSIDE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Service Improvement

Communication and Engagement Policy

Owner	**Executive Director of Corporate Services**
Responsible Person	**Head of Corporate Assurance**
Date Written	**April 2021**
Date of Last Review	**November 2026**
Date of next review	**November 2027**
EIA Reviewed	**November 2026**

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1. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication and engagement are essential to delivering our services, supporting our people and maintaining public trust and confidence.

Humberside Fire and Rescue Service (HFRS) is committed to providing clear, accurate and accessible information, listening to the views of employees, communities, partners and stakeholders, and creating meaningful opportunities for engagement.

This policy provides a Service-wide framework for communication and engagement. It sets the principles, responsibilities and minimum expectations that apply to internal and external communication, consultation and engagement, media relations, social media, campaigns, digital communication, photography, filming, visual content and partnership communication.

Detailed processes and delivery requirements are contained within the relevant Policy Delivery Guidance (PDG). Significant communications, campaigns, projects, consultations and change activity must involve the Corporate Communication Team at an early stage.

This policy applies to all employees, agency workers, volunteers, contractors and anyone acting on behalf of HFRS.

Core Code of Ethics

HFRS has adopted the Core Code of Ethics for Fire and Rescue Services. The Service is committed to the ethical principles of the Code and strives to apply them in all we do; therefore, those principles are reflected in this Policy.

National Guidance

Relevant national guidance adopted by HFRS will inform this policy, the associated PDGs and the Corporate Communications Assurance and Alignment Framework.

2. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

HFRS has a legal responsibility under the Equality Act 2010, and a commitment, to ensure it does not discriminate either directly or indirectly in any of its functions and services or in its treatment of employees, in relation to race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, age, pregnancy and maternity, religion and belief, gender reassignment or marriage and civil partnership. It also has a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled applicants, employees, and service users.

3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES

- Establish a consistent and coordinated approach to communication and engagement across HFRS.
- Support delivery of the Service's mission, Strategic Plan, Community Risk Management Plan and Core Code of Ethics.
- Ensure communication and engagement activity is lawful, ethical, proportionate, inclusive, accessible and evidence led.
- Define clear responsibilities and accountability for communication.
- Ensure significant communication is appropriately planned, owned, approved,

delivered and evaluated.
- Promote a consistent HFRS narrative while enabling communication to be tailored appropriately to different audiences.
- Ensure communication activity identifies the intended audience and purpose before determining the channel.
- Strengthen public and employee understanding, engagement, trust and confidence.
- Ensure feedback, questions and consultation activity are appropriately considered and closed by communicating what happened as a result.
- Provide an auditable approach to communication governance, evidence and continuous improvement.

4. ASSOCIATED DOCUMENTS

- Equality Impact Assessment
- Legal References
  - Data Protection Act 2018
  - Data Protection, Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2019
  - Copyright, Designs and Patent Act 1988
  - Civil Contingencies Act 2004
  - Communications Act 2003
  - Malicious Communications Act 1988
  - Defamation Act 2013
  - Protection from Harassment Act 1997
  - Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018
  - Online Safety Act 2023
  - National Security and Investment Act 2021
  - Data Protection and Digital Information Bill (2023 revision)
- Data Protection Policy
- Artificial Intelligence AI Policy
- Internet, Email and Instant Messaging Policy
- Dignity at Work Policy (anti Bullying and Harassment Procedure)
- Control of Contractors and Visitors Policy Delivery Guidance
- Internal Communication Policy Delivery Guidance.
- Consultation and Engagement Policy Delivery Guidance.
- Visual, Social and Media Communications Policy Delivery Guidance.
- National Guidance
  - National Operational Guidance - Warn, inform and advise people
  - Fire Standards: Communication and Engagement

5. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

All communication and engagement activities will be guided by the following principles.

Public First: Communication and engagement activity will consider the needs of communities, employees and other intended audiences and will use relevant evidence, insight and community-risk information to inform its approach.

Context Before Content: Communication should explain not only **what** is happening but, where

appropriate, why it matters, why it is happening and what it means for the intended audience.

Clear and Accessible: Communication will use clear and understandable language and accessible formats appropriate to the audience and channel.

Trusted and Transparent: Communication will be accurate, factual, professional and open. Where appropriate, the reasons for decisions, what is fixed and what remains open to influence should be clearly explained.

Named Ownership and Accountability: Significant communication should have an identifiable owner. Corporate Communications provides professional advice, coordination and assurance but does not replace the accountability of the person, station, section or function responsible for the information or decision being communicated.

Audience Before Channel:
The intended audience, their needs, accessibility, working patterns and preferred or appropriate communication routes should be considered before deciding which channel or format to use.

One HFRS Voice:
Core facts, organisational positions and strategic messages should remain consistent across HFRS, while wording, content, timing and channel can be adapted for different audiences.

Meaningful Engagement: Where HFRS seeks views, it must be clear whether people are being informed, engaged, formally consulted or invited to help develop an approach. Feedback should only be sought where there is a genuine opportunity for it to be considered.

Employee Voice: Employees should have appropriate opportunities to share feedback, ask questions and contribute ideas. Managers have an important role in explaining information, listening to colleagues, identifying misunderstandings and ensuring questions are appropriately escalated.

Close the Loop: Where views have been sought or questions invited, the relevant owner should communicate what was heard and, where appropriate, what changed, what did not change and why.

Evaluate and Improve: Communication activity should be evaluated proportionately against its objectives. Learning should inform future communication, campaigns and engagement activity.

6. POLICY DELIVERY GUIDANCE

This policy is supported by Policy Delivery Guidance (PDG) documents that provide processes, standards and requirements for communication and engagement activity.

The following PDGs support this policy:

PDG	Purpose
Internal Communication PDG	Sets out arrangements for communicating with employees through internal channels and leadership communications.
Consultation and	Provides the process for consultation, engagement activity and

Engagement PDG	gathering stakeholder feedback. As well as the process for employees feedback to consultations on behalf of HFRS
Visual, Social and Media Communications PDG	Sets out the requirements for managing social media channels, media enquiries, media monitoring (cuttings and clippings) and publicity. The guidance also covers the use of photography and videography, communications during the pre-election period and the submission and approval of promotion requests.

7. OUR APPROACH: INFORM, ENGAGE AND INSPIRE

Communication and engagement activity supports three core objectives:

Inform: Provide clear, accurate and timely information so employees, communities and stakeholders understand Service activity, priorities, decisions and, where relevant, the action expected of them.

Engage: Listen, respond and develop meaningful relationships through consultation, feedback, dialogue and stakeholder engagement. Engagement should make clear what people can influence and how their contribution will be considered

Inspire: Share authentic stories about our people, communities, services and achievements that demonstrate impact, recognise contribution and build understanding and pride in HFRS.

8. THE CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS ASSURANCE AND ALIGNMENT FRAMEWORK

The Framework establishes the HFRS approach for communication and engagement. It provides the methodology through which this policy and its supporting Policy Delivery Guidance are applied, planned, assured and evaluated.

The framework includes:

- Inform, Engage and Inspire communication pillars;
- Digital Platforms, Measurement and Insight, and Marketing as supporting enablers;
- HFRS communication principles;
- Strategic narrative and message hierarchy;
- Governance, accountability and three lines of assurance;
- Communication planning hierarchy;
- Proportionate application of OASIS method;
- The HFRS communication filter;
- Communication message labels;
- Internal, external and partnership delivery standards;
- Assurance and evidence requirements;
- Evaluation and reporting arrangements; and
- Continuous improvement expectations.

The framework must be applied proportionately. Routine communication will not require the same level of planning and evidence as complex, high-risk or Service-wide activity. The level of control should reflect significance, risk, reach, complexity, sensitivity and potential organisational impact.

9. PLANNING COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT

All significant communication, campaigns, projects, consultations and organisational change, the communication owner must involve the Corporate Communication Team early stage rather than immediately before publication and implementation.

In line with Internal Communications PDG, planning will be proportionate and must consider:

- The objective and intended outcome;
- Alignment with Service priorities;
- Intended audiences and stakeholders;
- Available audience insight;
- What is fixed and what remains open to influence;
- Named ownership;
- Key messages;
- Appropriate communication channels;
- Accessibility and equality considerations;
- Data protection and information-governance requirements;
- Partnership involvement;
- Risks and sensitivities;
- Approval requirements;
- Timescales and resources;
- Evaluation measures; and
- How questions, feedback and engagement will be closed.

10. WORKING WITH PARTNERS

The Service recognises the importance of working collaboratively with partners to achieve shared objectives and improve outcomes for communities.

Relevant partner activity should be coordinated before any communication is published, with the responsible owner/section to reduce duplication, support consistent messaging and make effective use of established community and networks.

Partnership activity must be conducted in a manner that protects the Service's reputation, maintains public confidence and reflects our values and strategic priorities.

11. SCOPE OF ACTIVITY

This policy applies to all corporate communication and engagement activity, including:

- Internal communication.
- External communication.
- Consultation and engagement.
- Media relations.
- Social media.
- Campaigns and public information.
- Website and digital communication.
- Photography, filming and visual content.
- Stakeholder and partnership engagement.

- Emergency and warning/informing communication.
- Partnership and multi-agency communication.
- Organisational change and project communication.
- Employee engagement and consultation.
- Marketing and behaviour-change campaigns.
- Media monitoring.
- Content supplied for publication by stations and sections.

12. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

All Employees responsible for:

- Communicating professionally and respectfully;
- Checking information before communicating it;
- Protecting personal, confidential and sensitive information;
- Complying with this policy and associated PDGs;
- Ensuring activity undertaken on behalf of HFRS reflects approved organisational positions;
- Seeking advice where activity could present significant reputational, legal, information, equality or operational risk; and
- Avoiding the amplification of unverified information.

Managers in addition to the existing duties:

- Support employees in understanding the context and implications of significant communications;
- Act as local communicators and sense-makers;
- Identify and escalate questions, concerns and misunderstandings;
- Make sure locally produced communications comply with relevant policy, guidance and approval arrangements; and
- Engage Corporate Communications early where significant communication, consultation, change or reputational considerations arise.

Stations, Sections and Content Owners

Stations, sections and other teams authorised to publish or submit content remain accountable for the accuracy, appropriateness and lawful handling of the information they provide. Access to an HFRS communication channel does not transfer responsibility for content to the Corporate Communication Team.

Content owners must ensure information is accurate, appropriate for publication, accessible where required, consistent with HFRS policy and approved organisational positions and does not disclose confidential, personal, sensitive or operationally restricted information.

Where there is uncertainty, heightened sensitivity or potential reputational impact, advice should be obtained from the Corporate Communication Team and/or the appropriate specialist function before publication.

Corporate Communications Team must

- Maintain the Corporate Communications Assurance and Alignment Framework;

- Coordinate significant communication and engagement activity;
- Manage corporate communication channels;
- Maintain communication standards, brand requirements and relevant guidance;
- Advise on communication planning, audience, messages and channels;
- Coordinate media relations;
- Monitor relevant communication performance;
- Support proportionate evaluation and continuous improvement; and
- Provide appropriate challenge or escalation where activity could create significant communication or reputational risk.

13. INSIGHT, EVALUATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Communication and engagement activity will be informed by insight, evidence, data and feedback.

Communication and engagement activity must have clear objectives and outcomes. Evaluation should be proportionate to the significance of the activity. Findings and learning should be used to improve future communication and engagement activities.

14. MONITORING, ASSURANCE AND REVIEW

The Corporate Communications Team will monitor communication and engagement activity through proportionate evaluation, performance information, feedback and quality review.

Communication owners retain responsibility for maintaining appropriate evidence of their activity, approvals and evaluation process.

Evidence used for assurance should be Valid, Authentic, Reliable, Current and Sufficient (VARCS). Significant gaps should have identified ownership and appropriate action