

OVERVIEW OF MEDIA COVERAGE RELATING TO THE INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT 5-YEAR PLAN PUBLIC CONSULTATION



PRESENTED TO: Executive Committee
DATE OF MEETING: Monday 9 July 2007
OFFICER PRESENTING REPORT: Nicole Targett
Corporate Communications Manager

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

To provide the Executive Committee with a profile of media activity during the consultation period of 12 February to 11 May 2007.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Committee is invited to NOTE the report.

3. BACKGROUND AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The public consultation for the 5-Year IRMP (Integrated Risk Management Plan) took place between 12 February and 11 May 2007. The consultation was carried out by Opinion Research Services (ORS) on behalf of the Combined Fire Authority. The Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) IRMP Team and other staff were involved in the planning and delivery of elements of the consultation.

Prior to the commencement of the project and consultation planning stages, project head Brigade Manager Des Tidbury agreed a proactive approach to working with the media. This was partly because of the complexity of the issues involved but also to ensure that the consultation was seen to be open and transparent.

It should be noted that press interest in the IRMP commenced as early as April last year. In order to address this interest, two media briefings were held at Brigade headquarters (26 June 2006) and at Windsor fire station (27 June 2006), for media from the eastern and western sides of the county. These included a two-hour briefing by Brigade Manager Des Tidbury followed by a question and answer session and distribution of press packs, including detailed documentation outlining the proposals. These were attended by print media only, although Brigade Manager Tidbury subsequently carried out three interviews for local radio (Reading 107, 210 FM and Kick FM).

Over the last year the corporate communications team have supplied background information on the IRMP process, the Fire Authority and RBFRS. Media colleagues have been given free access to follow-up questions and interviews with senior officers as and when requested.

Initial press interest regarding the IRMP proposals was limited. However, as more

reports were tabled at various Fire Authority meetings print media covering the Slough and Windsor areas began a campaign to maintain the status quo at Windsor fire station and this generated an enormous amount of coverage, together with related correspondence in the letters pages.

It was expected that editorial coverage from newspapers with a circulation area including Windsor would focus on the proposals for Windsor fire station. Great efforts were made to ensure the media were given full and accurate information on all the proposals, together with unlimited interview access to Brigade Manager Tidbury.

The Corporate Communications Team monitored the media coverage on a weekly basis and followed up any errors of fact. Where necessary, newspapers were contacted directly to discuss any obvious imbalance or errors of omission. In some cases, the team also requested that verification of factual information, together with a response was sought, in accordance with good journalistic practice.

Some of the print media coverage, particularly relating to the proposals for Windsor, contained inaccuracies. This was in some cases due to misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the complex data informing the IRMP planning process and in some cases due to a lack of balance between fact and opinion.

Statutory notices regarding the public consultation were placed in the Public Notices section of every weekly newspaper series in Berkshire and in the Reading Evening Post, week commencing 19 February 2007. Press releases were issued on 12 February, 28 March and 11 April (**see Appendices**).

Levels of general media coverage of the consultation across the county were less than expected although local media followed up aspects of the proposals relating to, variously, Reading (Dee Road and Caversham Road), Wokingham, Wargrave and Twyford, Sonning, Cookham and Crowthorne.

Reporting of the public consultation process reflected this trend. The majority of editorial comment on the consultation appeared in newspapers for the Windsor area whilst coverage elsewhere in the county was less extensive but was useful in publicising contact details for consultation responses.

The attached spreadsheets (**Appendices A and B**) itemise the media coverage relating to the IRMP proposals, related 'letters page' correspondence and the public consultation (**Appendix C**).

4. FINANCIAL, LEGAL, RISK MANAGEMENT AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Due to the controversial nature of some of the proposals contained within the IRMP 5-Year Plan every effort has been made to ensure that the Consultation process has been as robust as possible to withstand external scrutiny.

5. COMPLIANCE WITH STANDING ORDERS / FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

No direct impact.

6. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

The 5-Year IRMP directly improves four strategic aims of the RBFRS. It will help:

1. Minimise loss of life, injury and damage from fire.

2. Reduce the number of deaths, injuries and damage caused by hazards other than fire and render appropriate humanitarian service.
3. Deliver community safety education, tailored to users' needs, to reduce the number of fire calls and to minimise the consequences of fire.
4. Demonstrate continuous improvement in service delivery, based upon consultation and partnership working, within a Best Value framework.

7. ASSESSMENT AGAINST THE PARTNERSHIP FOR COMMON SENSE

Members will be aware that Representative Bodies are invited and are active participants in the preparation of all IRMP plans and projects.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

IRMP Working Party - 14 November 2006 Agenda items 4 and 5 and Minutes.

IRMP Working Party - 20 December Agenda item 4 and Minutes.

IRMP Working Party - 10 January 2007 Agenda item 5 and Minutes.

IRMP Working Party - 13 June 2007 Agenda items 4, 5 and 6 and Minutes (not yet approved).

9. COMMENTS RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY OFFICERS

a) Chief Fire Officer

The Chief Fire Officer supports this report.

b) Fire Authority Treasurer

The Authority Treasurer has noted this report.

c) Clerk and Monitoring Officer

The Clerk and Monitoring Officer has noted this report.

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Date of report: 21 June 2007