Automatic Fire Alarm Consultation

Summary Report 2022

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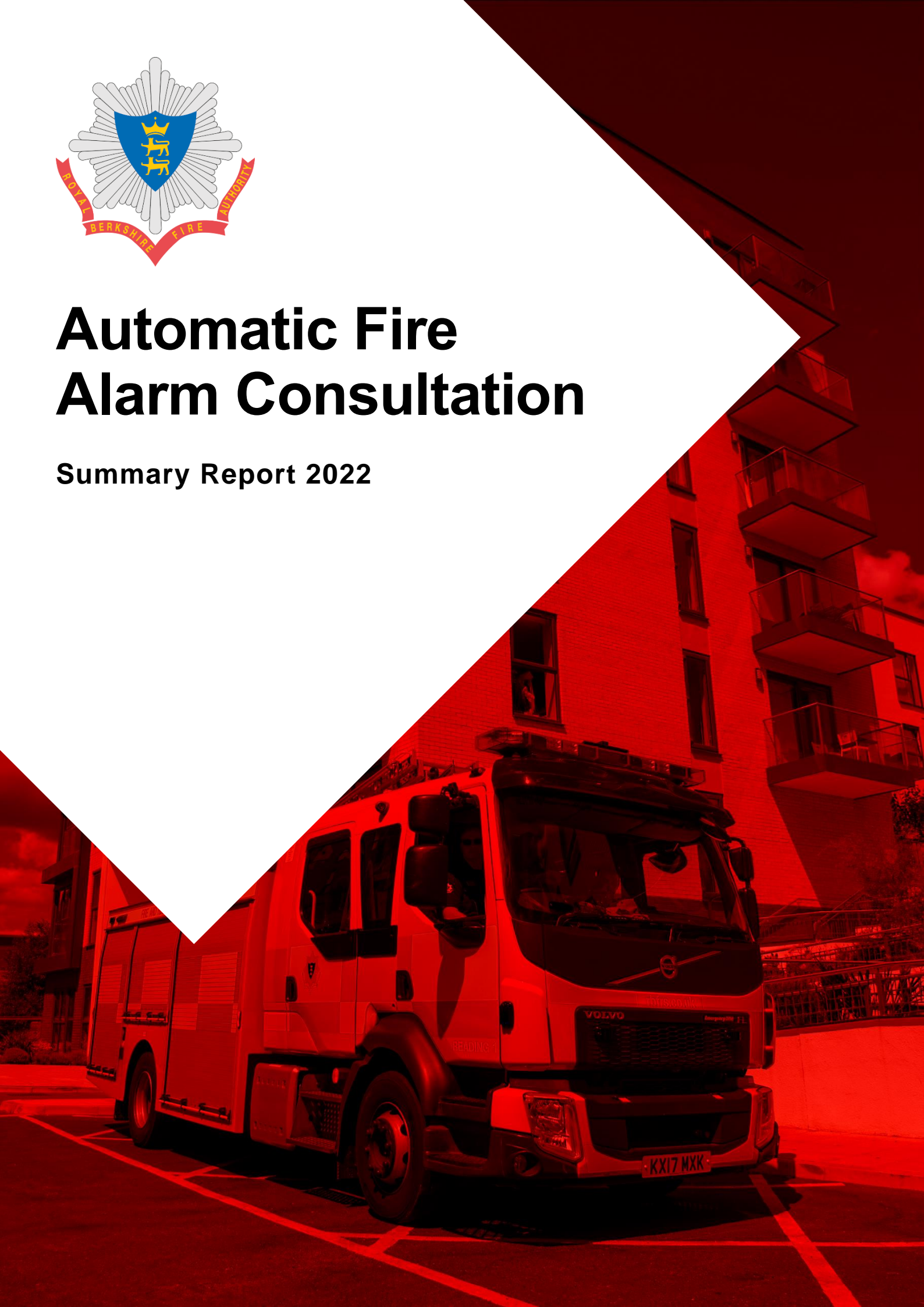
Consultation Headlines

Total Responses

468

'Easy Read' Responses

3

Hard Copy Responses

32

Survey

433

Social Media Engagement

11,153 reached
12,386 impressions

195 video views

452 engagements
25,890 impressions

622 video views
3,011 impressions

404 video views
5,047 impressions

21% of responses were from RBFRS staff

1,373 community contacts were emailed

47% of responses were from residents

69 engagements took place with the community

50% increase in responses overall compared to our last public consultation

53% increase in responses from Organisations compared to our last public consultation

340% increase in responses from business owners compared to our last public consultation

4% increase in responses from residents compared to our last public consultation

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Executive Summary

This report summarises the main findings from the Automatic Fire Alarm Consultation, which was carried out by Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) on behalf of Royal Berkshire Fire Authority (RBFA).

The consultation ran from 17 January 2022 – 28 March 2022.

The consultation, which ran for 10 weeks, asked for people's views on how their fire and rescue service responds to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) in lower-risk, occupied buildings such as shops, office blocks and factories. This is because 99% of the Automatic Fire Alarm calls are false alarms, placing a significant burden on the Fire and Rescue Service, with on average, 2,200 Automatic Fire Alarm calls attended every year that are false alarms.

The consultation did not propose any change to how we respond to AFAs in higher-risk buildings, where we would continue to send a fire engine upon notification of an alarm sounding and under both options in the consultation, a fire engine will always be sent when there is a confirmed fire.

During the consultation, we received 468 responses from various stakeholders. Details of respondents are included within the report, but overall, the data shows:

62% of respondents preferred Option A – to change the way we respond to Automatic Fire Alarms in lower-risk, occupied buildings.

38% of respondents preferred Option B – to keep the way we respond to Automatic Fire Alarms the same as it currently is.

This document provides information on how the consultation was conducted and presents an analysis of the data gathered. You can read in full the rationale for undertaking the consultation in the Automatic Fire Alarm Consultation Document.

What We Consulted On

During the consultation, the Fire Authority encouraged as many people as possible to have their say on the two options, which were also made available in a variety of accessible formats and languages. The two options were:

Option A - change our current policy to help reduce the burden of false alarms on our Service (please see flow chart below).

When the Fire and Rescue Service Control Room receives a notification of an Automatic Fire Alarm sounding, we will ask the building to confirm the cause of the alarm. As part of Option A in this consultation:

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- The second call back after 20 minutes is removed because the occupier will do their necessary fire safety checks and let us know if there is a fire.
- If there is a fire, we will send a fire engine.
- If we can't make contact with the building, we will send a fire engine.
- If they don't call back or confirm there is a fire, we won't send a fire engine at that time.

Alarm goes off

notifiying the Alarm Receiving Centre

Alarm Receiving Centre should call the premises and then TVFCS* to confirm the cause of the alarm

TVFCS answers the call and takes the appropriate action

No fire confirmed

No fire engine is sent

Fire confirmed

A fire engine is sent

Unconfirmed with premises

TVFCS call the premises to confirm the cause of the alarm

TVFCS is unable to make contact with the premises to confirm the cause of the alarm

A fire engine is sent to the premises

TVFCS makes contact with the building occupier

No fire confirmed

No fire engine is sent at that time

Fire confirmed

A fire engine is sent

Cause of the alarm remains unconfirmed

Building occupier should investigate cause of the alarm

Building occupier does not call back

No fire engine is sent at that time

No fire confirmed

No fire engine is sent at that time

Fire confirmed

A fire engine is sent
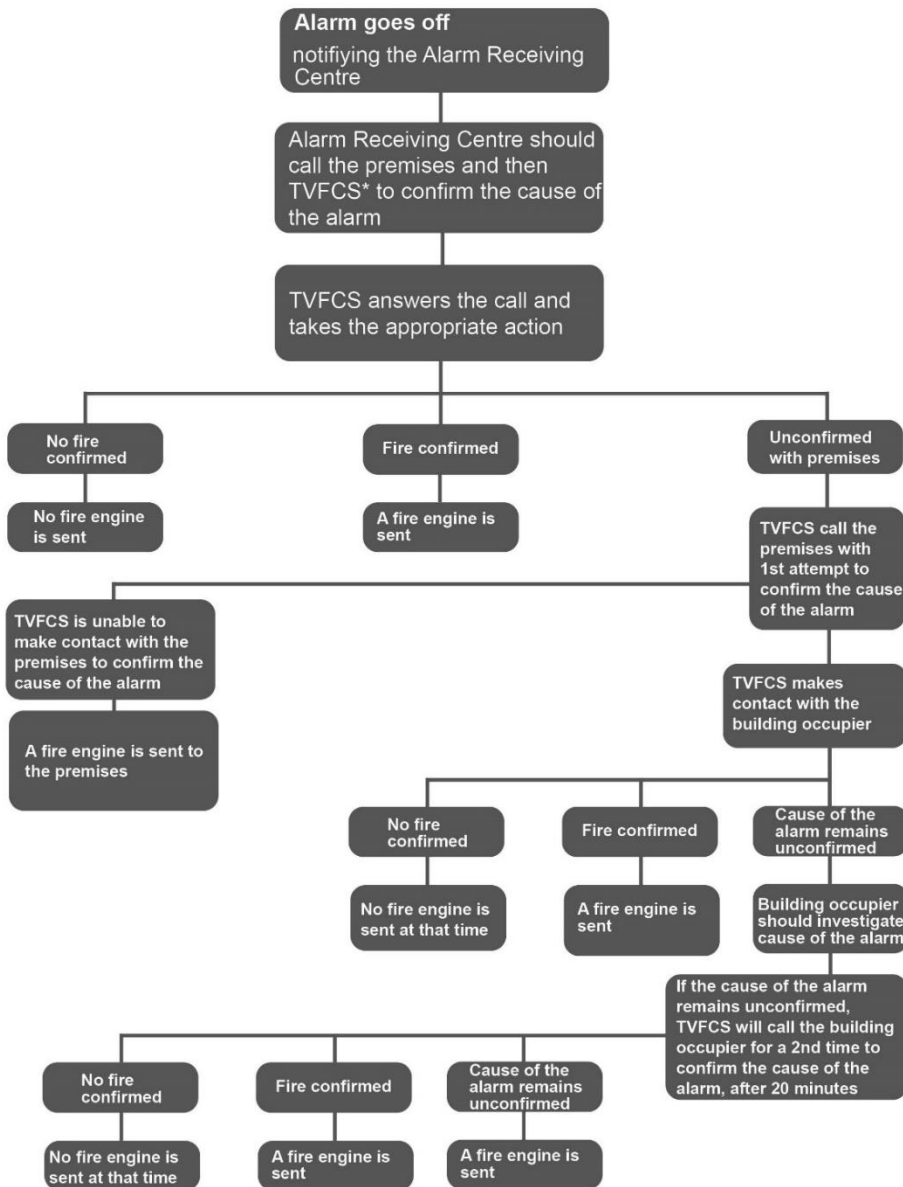
*TVFCS – Thames Valley Fire Control Service

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Option B - do not change the way we respond to Automatic Fire Alarms (please see flow chart below).

When the Fire and Rescue Service Control Room receives a notification of an Automatic Fire Alarm sounding, we will continue to apply our current policy and will not change the way we respond to AFAs. As part of Option B in this consultation:

- If there is no fire, we won't send a fire engine.
- If there is a fire, we will send a fire engine.
- If we can't make contact with the building, we will send a fire engine.
- OR if the alarm goes off and the occupier is unable to confirm the cause on the first call, we will ask them to check if there is a fire as part of their necessary fire safety checks. If a fire is still not confirmed, we will call again for a second time, after 20 minutes, and if it's still not confirmed, we will send a fire engine.

* TVFCS – Thames Valley Fire Control Service

The difference between these two options is removing the second call back by Thames Valley Fire Control Service after 20 minutes for lower-risk, occupied buildings because the building owner, responsible for fire safety would be completing their necessary checks, in line with their fire risk assessment.

Methodology

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 provides the statutory instrument that requires fire and rescue services (FRS) to have due regard to the Fire and Rescue National Framework for England. The Framework provides guidance on Community Risk Management Planning (CRMP), and suggests that a CRMP should:

"Reflect effective consultation throughout its development and at all review stages with the community, its workforce and representative bodies and partners."

Government consultation guidance principles suggest that the length of consultation should be proportionate to the nature and impact of the proposals. This consultation period ran for 10 consecutive weeks from 17 January 2022 – 28 March 2022.

Depending on the nature of the proposals we are planning to take forward, we follow our own Organisational consultation principles:

- **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.

- **Internal Consultation:** When proposed changes do not materially affect the service we provide to the public, we will consult internally with our staff in line with agreed policies and procedures. For example, these changes could include changes to working patterns, changes to IT systems or changes to ways of working.

In carrying out the consultation, RBFRS also followed the legal principles that underpin consultation. These are known as the four 'Gunning Principles' which specify how public bodies should consult. They specify that:

- ✔ Consultation should be carried out when proposals are at the formative stage;

- ✔ Sufficient information is provided to allow intelligent consideration of the proposals;

- ✔ Adequate time is given for response; and

- ✔ Responses are conscientiously considered before decisions are taken.

You can access RBFRS' Consultation Strategy online.

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Consultation Resources

The Automatic Fire Alarm consultation was widely publicised across the Service's digital channels, including social media platforms, website, intranet (available to RBFRS staff) and online and local media. This promotion was delivered, alongside in-person community engagement activity led by our teams across the County. Consultation materials were made available via a number of accessible methods.

These included:

- Online via rbfrs.co.uk/consultations.

- Social media.

- Local and online media.

- Hard copies of leaflets, posters and surveys.

- Information about the consultation was sent via email.

- Engagement events/ activity.

- Signposting via email.

In order to improve engagement with the consultation, specific community and business stakeholders were identified and contacted directly.

Communications

Website

A section was created on the RBFRS website on the 'Consultation' page. This included:

- An introduction, detailing what the consultation was focusing on.
- A short animated video, which explained what the current process is versus the proposed process that was being consulted on.
- Information on how people could take part in the consultation.
- A link to the survey.
- A link to the consultation documents.
- An 'Easy Read' version of the consultation document and survey.
- A large text format version of the consultation document.
- A plain text format version of the consultation document.
- A Punjabi, Polish and Urdu version of the consultation document and survey.
- An email address, postal address and telephone number to provide alternative methods of response.

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- Details on accessibility for people requiring alternative formats or languages.

We had a total of 1,011 visits to the website page during the time the consultation was running and it was the 12th most popular page on the RBFRS website.

Throughout the course of the consultation, updates were added to the RBFRS website to remind people take part. One was added at the point of launch, at the midway point, with a week to go and finally, to confirm the consultation had closed.

Media

A press release was issued to media contacts at the beginning of the consultation on 17 January 2022, which provided details of the consultation and how to get involved, outlining the reasons for the consultation and the importance of residents having their say. Following this, the Communications and Engagement Team actively engaged with local media by phone to encourage coverage and promote the consultation to residents.

Social Media

To complement the channels above, social media was used throughout the consultation programme to enable respondents to share the information and to encourage engagement.

Information was posted on RBFRS' Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn pages at regular intervals, to encourage people to participate in the consultation. Information about the consultation was 'shared' in Facebook community groups, and key partner agencies and local groups, such as unitary authorities, were 'tagged' in Twitter posts to enable them to share the messages with their followers. The consultation information and how to take part was shared to over 60 community groups and just under 30 organisations were tagged on Twitter.

During the consultation, the following videos were shared:

- Animated video explaining the current and proposed process.
- A member of staff from the Community Risk Management Plan Team.
- A member of staff from Response.
- A member of staff from Thames Valley Fire Control Service.
- Crowthorne Fire Cadets.

These videos were published on our social media channels and in Facebook community groups, alongside a selection of social media cards that highlighted the key messages of the consultation.

Trialling New Methods of Communication

In order to continue to develop and evolve the way we communicate consultations to the public, we trialled two new methods this year to see if they supported better engagement and responses.

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This was the first year we had created an animated video and wanted to try this method of communication to see if we saw improved engagement by comparison to previous consultations. During our last consultation, the launch video saw 106 views on YouTube throughout the entire consultation period. When compared to the animated video that was used for the Automatic Fire Alarm consultation, which saw 243 views on YouTube, we saw a 129% increase in views, demonstrating the animated video had higher engagement.

Separately, we trialled paid-for promotion on Facebook and Instagram of the Automatic Fire Alarm video, which resulted in 9,982 people being reached and 286 people clicking on the link to complete the survey. While we can't confirm a definitive link between the 286 people that clicked the link to complete the survey and this resulting in completed survey responses, we understand that this may have had a positive impact on the overall response rate which is 50% higher than our last public consultation.

Analytics

We saw positive engagement through the analytics for Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram.

Impressions refers to the number of times your content is displayed, no matter if it was clicked or not. Reach refers to the number of unique users who saw your content.

- Our 14 Facebook posts resulted in 11,153 people being reached and 12,386 impressions.
- Collectively, between organic and paid-for Facebook posts, we reached 21,135 people in total.
- From the over 60 community groups we posted in, they have approximately 400,000 members, which we may have reached. Due to the page set up, there no way of formally tracking the engagement or reach of this so the above figure is indicative.
- On Instagram, we had 195 views on the consultation video and used 'Insta stories' to continually promote the consultation throughout the 10 weeks.
- In total, our 37 Twitter posts received 25,890 impressions and had 452 engagements.
- Our 12 Linkedin posts achieved 3,011 impressions and 622 views on the video content published through this channel. The content here was a combined use of both the videos and static social media assets and the engagement is tracked only through Linkedin.
- Our five videos posted throughout the duration of the consultation, including the animated video, received 404 views on YouTube and 5,047 impressions. The last consultation we ran shared two videos on YouTube which had combined views of 177 views which means the videos for this consultation overall saw 128% more views.

Consultation Activity

Throughout the consultation period, community engagement activity was carried out by teams across the Service to support responses:

- Letters and emails were sent to 1,373 community contacts across a broad range of organisations, from schools to faith groups and disability organisations. This wide range of

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contacts was used in order to encourage as many areas of our community as possible to take part in our consultation – particularly those who have been under-represented in our consultations in previous years.

- Details of the consultation were shared with local authorities to include in their residents' newsletters.
- Letters were sent to partner agencies and contacts, including neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services, the Leaders of the unitary authorities, the Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner, MPs and Town and Parish Councils. Representative bodies including the Fire Brigades Union, Fire Officers Association, National Fire Chiefs Council and Unison were all sent letters and invited to respond.
- A variety of engagement activities were undertaken at a Hub level throughout the period of the consultation. There were 69 separate actions completed by Service Delivery staff from Prevention, Protection and Response, as well as, RBFRS volunteers. The activities comprised visits to local businesses and trading estates, contact with schools and promotion through fire station social media accounts.
- Fire crews took the opportunity to promote the consultation while carrying out their usual duties and often combined this work with activities such as risk information gathering.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

RBFRS recognises the importance of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) and operates in accordance with our EDI Objectives. These Objectives are currently being reviewed following a recent public consultation to ensure that they consider the priority areas set out by the National Fire Chiefs Council Equality Framework.

In line with consultation best practice, at the beginning of our consultation process, we created an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), which we have continually reviewed and updated where needed.

This EIA ensures that we are aware of the risks and impact of our work on individuals or groups who are protected under the nine protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 and the methods we can do to mitigate these risks. The intent of the EIA is to ensure that we are aware of the risks and impacts of our work on individuals or groups who share protected characteristics, and other non-statutory social characteristics as identified within our documentation (such as rurality, homelessness and those with caring responsibilities). A copy of this is available upon request.

For this consultation, building on our previous consultation activity and seeking continuous improvement, we felt it was extremely important to ensure our documentation and survey could both be accessible in multiple formats to support engagement from as many individuals as possible.

For this, we worked with an external organisation who created an 'Easy Read' version of our consultation document. An 'Easy Read' version was one way we made the information more accessible to people with learning disabilities by using short, simple sentences with pictures. This

document was then presented to a focus group of individuals who also had a learning disability and adapted based on their feedback to ensure they were understandable and accessible.

Additionally, translations in Punjabi, Polish and Urdu were also made available during the consultation, alongside a large text and plain text formats. These languages were selected as according to the 2011 Census data, they were the top three languages, outside of English, spoken in Berkshire. Additionally, we have Google Translate as a built in function on our website, making the consultation material available in up to 108 languages. Further translations of the consultation document could also be made available upon request.

During the consultation process, we were also able to analyse our ongoing response rate from various groups through the EDI data we collected through Survey Monkey. This enabled us to assess where we may need to target more specific communication work and adapt our strategy as the consultation progressed. As a result, we completed targeted activities to increase the response rate from Slough as this was consistently low.

Analysis of Data

The majority of the data was gathered via an online survey conducted using 'Survey Monkey'. Additionally, some hard copies of the survey were completed by the local community during engagement activity. All data was anonymised in line with best practice.

Quantitative data was used in a number of ways during this consultation. Our Survey Monkey platform enabled us to provide an indication of response rate to the survey, including skipped questions and impartial completions. It also provided:

- Equality and diversity information to analyse the demographic profile of respondents.

- An indication of the capacity in which the respondents were replying, such as an individual resident of Royal Berkshire or on behalf of an organisation.

- The overall percentage of responses who preferred Option A or B. This indicated the weight of preference from the respondents in total. We also broke this data down to look at responses from individual groups to further examine the findings.

Open-ended questions were used to enable respondents to provide individual and specific feedback on the consultation proposals.

Data was analysed using coding methodology; common themes in the feedback were highlighted and patterns in responses are available in the summary of themes section.

A sample of the feedback received under both Option A and B are included in the following sections. In order to remain transparent and impartial, we have ensured that due consideration was given to all feedback collected, analysing comments using coding methodology, before the most representative were collated for this report.

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Responses to Consultation

We received 468 responses to the consultation in total. These responses were comprised from the following methods:

- 433 responses were received from our online survey monkey.
- Three responses via our online Easy Read Survey Monkey tool.
- 32 hard copies of the survey were completed during community engagement activity.

468 responses was a 50% increase in responses since our last public consultation that was held in 2020.

In order to ensure honest and open feedback, organisations were not required to detail which organisation they were responding on behalf of, however, from the organisations that did provide this, we know we've received responses from:

- Reading Borough Council.
- Leicester Fire and Rescue Service.
- Brookside Group Practice.
- Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- Surrey Fire and Rescue Service.
- Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service.

The tables and figures below illustrate the demographic profile of the respondents who gave their feedback to the consultation through our Survey Monkey platform. We have collated our responses from both our Survey Monkey survey and 'Easy Read' version.

Within our data reporting, we have noted the number of questions that were answered, as well as the number of questions skipped. We have presented this data in order to be transparent. We felt that it was important that respondents did have the option to skip questions, in order to encourage participation and a higher response rate. If we were not to allow respondents to skip questions, we may have achieved a lower response rate or missed an opportunity to collect data and feedback about our proposals across the survey.

Main Findings

Option A or B
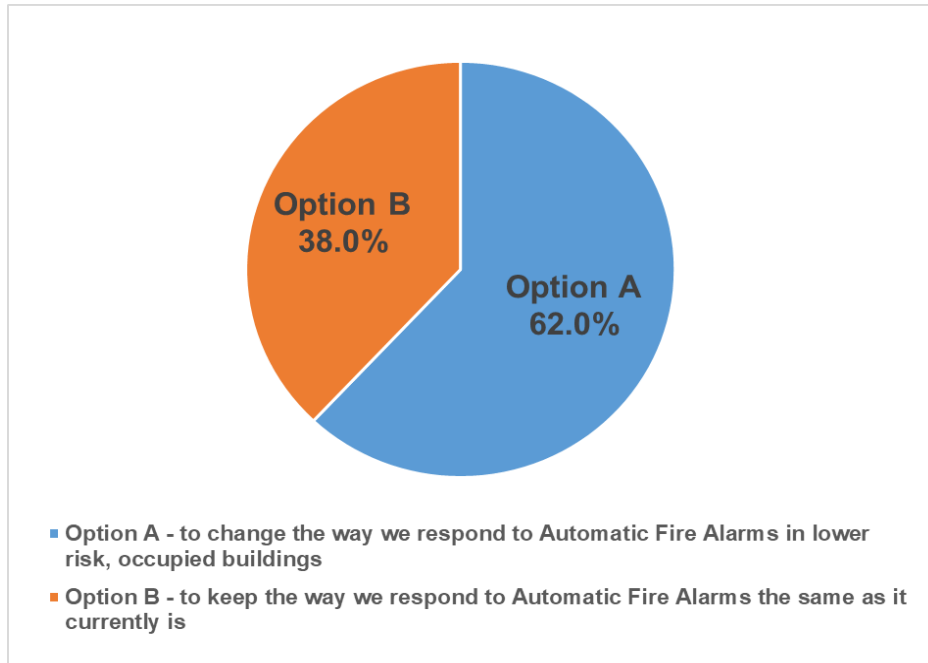
The data shows that:

- 62% of respondents preferred Option A – to change the way we respond to Automatic Fire Alarms in lower-risk, occupied buildings.
- 38% of respondents preferred Option B – to keep the way we respond to Automatic Fire Alarms the same as it currently is.

This is reflected in the below table by respondents:

Please note: the total number of respondents highlighted below is 367 out of the total number of survey responses received. This is because respondents were allowed to skip questions as good practice suggests this is appropriate for consultations to ensure better response rates.

Preferred Options		
Respondent type	Number of respondents (Option A)	Number of respondents (Option B)
Business owner	15	7
On behalf of an organisation or representative group	26	18
RBFRS Staff member	72	31
Resident	86	67
Work in Berkshire	20	12

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Other (please specify)	6	7
Total	**225**	**142**

Business owners, organisations, RBFRS staff and residents were all in favour of Option A. Conversely, people who work in Berkshire were more in favour of Option B.

There was a less than 1% point variation between male and female respondents in preference in favour of Option A or Option B.

Summary of Themes

Option A

A number of common themes were identified amongst the comments entered by respondents via Survey Monkey that preferred Option A. Responses collected by Survey Monkey were analysed and coded to identify key themes around the proposal, which included:

- **Saving RBFRS time** (80 mentioned it).
- **Free up resources for other work** (66 people mentioned it).
- **Cost saving from not responding to false alarms** (60 people mentioned it).
- **The duty of the Responsible Person to comply with their fire safety measures** (45 people mentioned it).
- **More efficient ways of working** (34 people mentioned it).

These core themes from respondents who preferred Option A are reflected in the below comments that were detailed in the open-ended question.

None of the respondents that chose Option A indicated a concern about increased risk. Narrative answers focused on the benefits including:

"I work in a residential care home for adults with learning disabilities. As much as we try to practice evacuations with the people we support, if we were to have a fire we may need someone to be rescued. Clearly, in this scenario we need a fire engine here as soon as possible, if they are attending an empty office it is putting lives at risk."

"It would appear that there are a huge number of false alarms. In lower-risk buildings, your Option A will hopefully reduce wasted time and ensure that fire engines can attend emergencies on less time and hopefully save lives."

"It allows firefighters to use their time more efficiently and thus improve fire safety throughout the County."

"I have chosen Option A due to the time savings which enable firefighters to spend more time on other activities and enable improved availability of fire engines for actual emergencies. Based on the data presented, the risk associated with making this change appears low."

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201 respondents also provided additional comments in a free text question. In the additional comments section, nine people stated that it is the duty of the Responsible Person at the premises to manage their building and its alarm system. Eight people added comments, which called for further fire safety and Protection education and consultation to support both the change and the Responsible Persons who will have to adjust to it.

Those who had selected Option A added the following additional information:

"Consultation and collaboration with building owners/managers/ARC's also appears to be a critical component to reducing the number of non-required call-outs."

"These types of changes always take years to filter out to the people affected so a good marketing campaign will be required."

Respondents who chose Option A were positive in their decision and used the free text option in Question 4 to reaffirm their choice:

"Really good idea. Hope it happens."

"Please implement the changes as soon as possible. I just can't understand why you go to so many false alerts."

"A review of how Fire & Rescue Service's respond to Automatic Fire Alarms is well overdue."

Option B

A number of common themes were identified amongst the comments entered by respondents via Survey Monkey that preferred Option B. Responses collected by Survey Monkey were analysed and coded to identify key themes around the proposal, which included:

- **Change will increase the risk of fire** (75 people mentioned it).
- **The Responsible Persons on the premises may be incapacitated by fire** (24 people mentioned it).
- **The building may not be able to confirm if there is a fire** (15 people mentioned it).
- **The onus is on the Responsible Persons/ fire wardens** (Nine people mentioned it).

These core themes from respondents who preferred Option B are reflected in the below comments that were detailed in the open-ended question.

Additional comments made by respondents who chose Option B expressed concern that the proposed changes were a cost-cutting activity that placed savings over safety:

"Safety of buildings and residents is paramount."

"Option A appears to have an increased level of risk because if you don't hear back, you assume everything is ok which is an unsafe conclusion to draw."

"There is no guarantee that the occupiers have not been overcome during the investigation of the alarm."

"Always best to be on the safe side and saves time as you'll never know whether it's a false alarm or not. I'd rather have a fire engine turn up, confirm that all is well and there's no fire situation."

13 people suggested that RBFRS should consider charging for attendance at false alarms. Of these, three were RBFRS staff members, eight were residents and the remainder worked in Berkshire or were in the 'other' category. No business or organisational respondents referenced the notion of charging for attendance at AFAs.

The data indicated that 23 respondents indicated in the open-ended text fields either felt that the wording of the consultation was unclear or, in answering demonstrated that they did not clearly understand the nature of the proposed change. For example:

"Option B I think, but I found the phrasing a bit confusing."

"Not sure."

"It isn't clear from this survey if the automatic response is for businesses or homes? I would want all alarms to be investigated and an engine sent if the service cannot contact the owner for any reason."

There was also commonality between respondents who chose Option A and B regarding a desire to see further provision of Protection education to support improved fire safety.

"Take the opportunity to advise the owner of improving detection."

"You need to do more to educate people about how to make their buildings safe. They need help and advice, it's not enough just to go to fewer alarms. You need to do this AND help people to have safer buildings."

"Building investigation training should be given to all occupiers to reduce risks of injury."

"The time saved should be spent educating Responsible Persons of their requirement to ensure fire safety in these premises. We still meet so many tenants/occupiers/owners of buildings who don't understand their responsibilities regarding fire risk assessments so time should be used to visit premises."

Thames Valley Fire Control Service

13 members of staff who identified as being from Thames Valley Fire Control responded to the consultation. All 13 chose Option A and were in favour of changing the way we responded to Automatic Fire Alarms.

"I chose Option A as this will make it more efficient responding to fire alarm calls and takes away the need to chase a site after 20 minutes, especially if it is busy with incidents in the control room at the time."

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"I have chosen Option A because it is a far more practical way of working from a control room perspective - trusting the Responsible Persons on site to confirm if there is a fire or no fire at the premise."

"Option A as occupier is capable of doing the necessary checks and calling back the fire service if required. The requirement to call back the premises in Option B after 20 minutes is not always a workable process and can easily be missed due to other operational needs in the control room."

Question 4 offered the opportunity to add additional free text comments. Three TVFCS staff members took this opportunity to suggest that a collaborative effort should be carried out to align AFA policy across all three partner fire and rescue services.

Neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services

Oxfordshire County Council Fire and Rescue Service confirmed that it responded to the consultation via the survey, stating that it agreed with the Option A proposal, and that it will free up more time for community fire safety, protection, operational risk gathering activity and training. This response is included in the overall survey responses.

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service confirmed that it responded to the consultation, supporting Option A. In its response, it highlighted that it would not see any benefit in Option B given that if a Responsible Person is unable to identify the cause of a fire within 20 minutes, then it is likely that the cause would be an unwanted fire signal. Should a fire have occurred it is also likely that a second detector head would have activated. Given this and the buildings that the consultation relates to being low-risk premises, then the building's passive and active fire safety measures should be sufficient and the likelihood of spread between compartments is diminished.

Representative Bodies

The Fire Brigades Union, Fire Officers Association and UNISON were all contacted during the consultation period and were encouraged to respond. No formal responses have been identified as being from the representative bodies.

Equality and Diversity Monitoring

In Appendix A, we have presented the raw data comparison of EDI data from this consultation and the CRMP Strategy Consultation of 2020. This data is provided to show how we have changed and modified the way in which we collect EDI data through more inclusive answer options, to better represent the diversity within the communities we serve. As such, making direct comparisons is challenging as the questions asked and options offered have changed over time. For example, in relation to gender we presented six options, as opposed to seven in the previous consultation. Additionally, we didn't ask respondents in the 2020 consultation which unitary authority they lived in when responding to the consultation.

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Within this consultation, we also expanded the opportunity for respondents to self-describe. This has been offered to increase the inclusivity of the consultation, ensuring that all respondents are able to describe themselves in the language they wish to use, whilst simultaneously indicating where we may have missed opportunities to add sufficient options to represent the fullest range of possible answers. For this consultation, the NFCC Equality of Access documents were reviewed to ensure that due consideration was given to how we could engage with different groups of people across the County to make a positive difference. For future consultations, we will be considering how we can continue to develop the accessibility and inclusivity in line with good practice and the NFCC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Project Team national guidance.

We are continually working to improve the way in which we reach and engage with different groups across Royal Berkshire. In the future, we will be considering further the pre-engagement work we may be able to do with different groups within our County to inform our consultation activity and promote inclusivity within our work with the public. We continue to be committed to promoting diversity and inclusion across the work that we do at Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Figures used for representation of the population of Berkshire are taken from the most recent National Census in 2011, as well as The Office for National Statistics. We await the publication of the next Census, later this year and will use it to inform our understanding of the community we serve.

Respondents Profile

The figures below illustrate the demographic profile for all responses via the Survey Monkey questionnaire. RBFRS is committed to promoting equality and diversity, and therefore by collecting this information we are able to monitor the response rate to our consultation across a range of communities and backgrounds. This enables us to continually evaluate our work and to improve efforts to engage a representative sample of people within Royal Berkshire as a process of ongoing development.

Response Capacity

Are you responding as:

Answered: 367   Skipped: 98
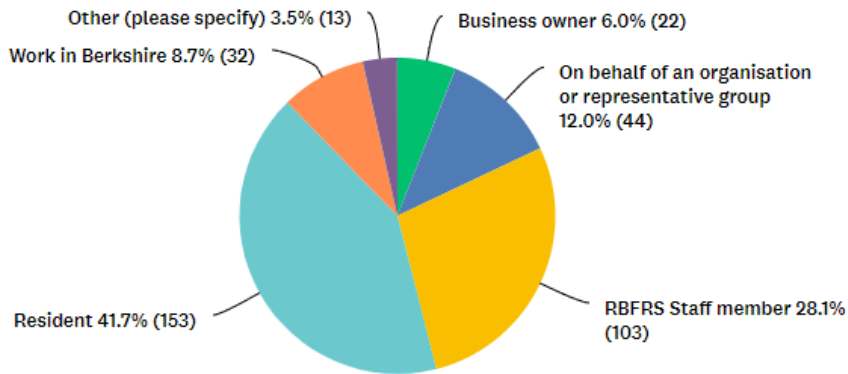
Answer Choices	Response %	Response Number
Business Owner	6.0%	22
On behalf of an organisation or representative Group	12.0%	44
RBFRS Staff member	28.1%	103
Resident	41.7%	153
Work in Berkshire	8.7%	32
Other	3.5%	13
Total		**367**

The data showed that:

- 41.7% of respondents identified themselves as a resident of Royal Berkshire.
- 28.1% of respondents identified themselves as working for RBFRS.
- The smaller representation came from those who identified as a business owner.

In comparison to the previous consultation, we asked respondents to confirm which capacity they were responding to the consultation in the same way as previously captured. We did see an increased response rate from business owners, those who were responding on behalf of an organisation and those who worked in Berkshire. This may suggest that our targeted communication work towards these groups encouraged positive uptake and engagement. These figures showed:

- 633% increase in responses from business owners compared to CRMP strategies consultation. This is an increase from three to 22 responses from businesses.
- 100% increase in responses from respondents on behalf of an organisation compared to CRMP strategies consultation.
- 28% increase in responses from residents compared to the CRMP strategies consultation.

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Unitary Response Rates

Where do you live?

Answered: 365   Skipped: 100
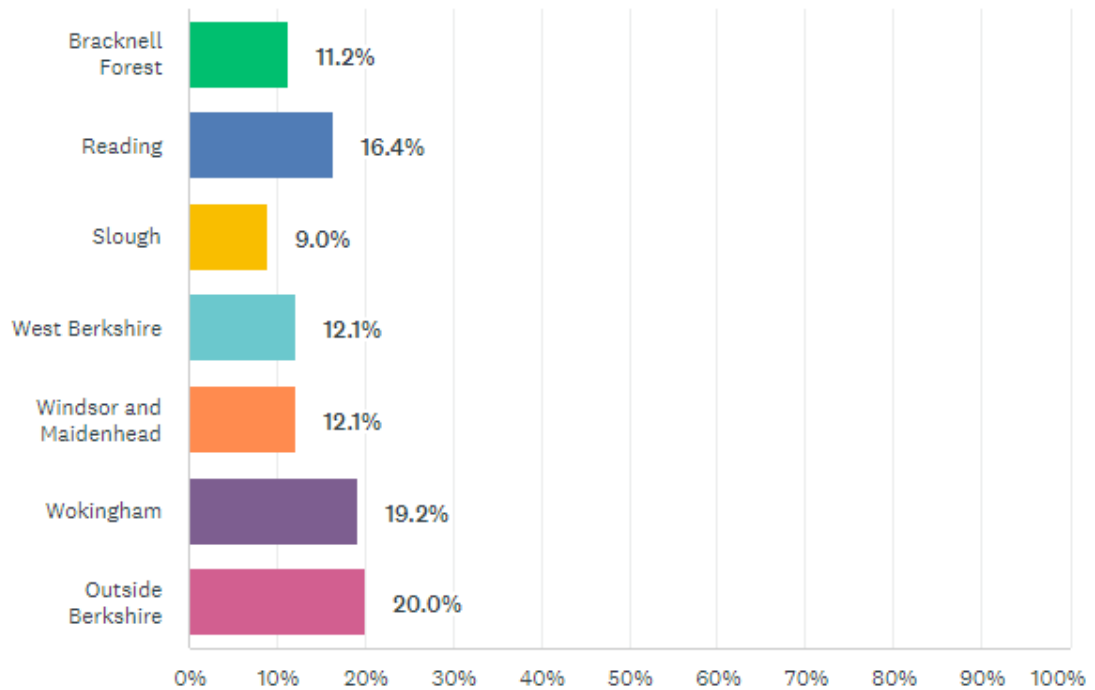
Answer Choices	Response %	Response Number
Bracknell Forest	11.2%	41
Reading	16.4%	60
Slough	9.0%	33
West Berkshire	12.1%	44
Windsor and Maidenhead	12.1%	44
Wokingham	19.2%	70
Outside Berkshire	20.0%	73
Total		**365**

The data shows:

- 19.2% of people who responded selected Wokingham as where they live and this was the highest.
- 9.0% of people who responded selected Slough and this was our lowest response rate.

The highest rate of response per unitary authority was Wokingham, Reading and Bracknell Forest respectively. Lower levels of response from both Slough Borough Council and West Berkshire
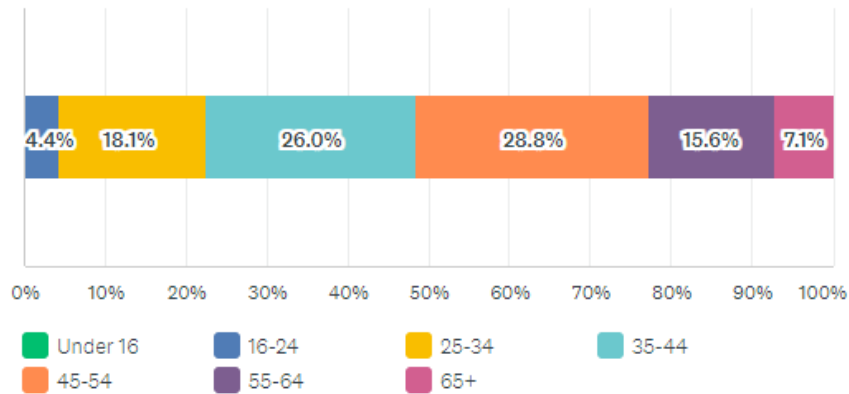
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Council's population indicate that future consultations may address an equality of access issue to increase engagement.

Age

What is your age?

Answered: 365   Skipped: 100

Answer Choices	Response %	Response Number
Under 16	0.0%	0
16-24	4.4%	16
25-34	18.1%	66
35-44	26.0%	95
45-54	28.8%	105
55-64	15.6%	57
65+	7.1%	26
Total		**365**

The data showed that:

- 28.8% of the respondents identified their age as between 45-54 years old.
- The smallest number of respondents came from those aged between 16-24 (4.4%), however this is still an improvement from our previous consultation that saw 0% of respondents within this age category suggesting an improvement in how we engaged with this group.

The average age in Berkshire is 38.9 years old[1]. Whilst we did not collect the average age of respondents within this consultation, we saw an increase of 35% in those selecting the 25-34 age bracket when compared to previous consultations, giving us a more even proportion of responses.
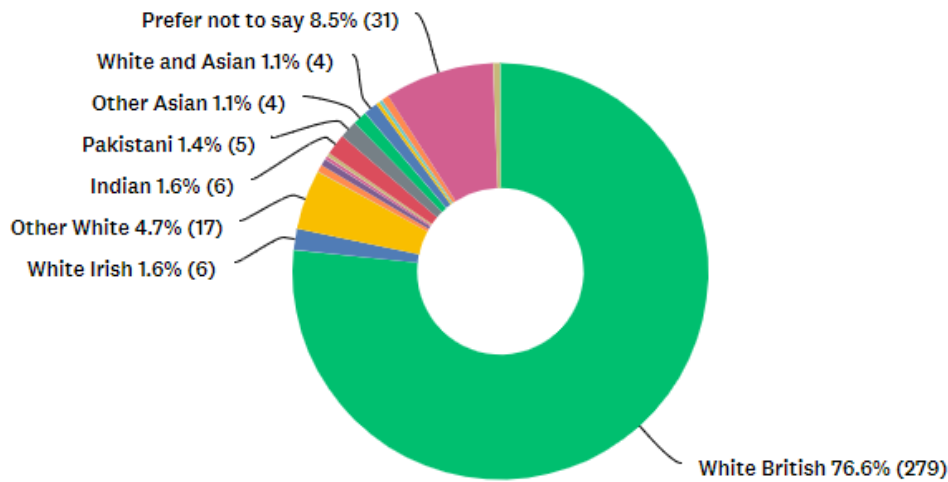
[1] ONS census data

Overall, it is challenging to draw a direct comparison from response rate by age, relative to the population of Berkshire as the ONS data does not correlate directly with the options respondents had as part of this consultation.

Ethnicity

Which of the following best describes your Ethnic Group

Answered: 364   Skipped: 101

Answer Choices	Response %	Response Number
White British	76.6%	279
White Irish	1.6%	6
Other White	4.7%	17
Black African	0.0%	0
Black Caribbean	0.5%	2
Other Black	0.5%	2
Bangladeshi	0.3%	1
Chinese	0.3%	1
Indian	1.6%	6
Pakistani	1.4%	5
Other Asian	1.1%	4
White and Asian	1.1%	4
White and Black African	0.3%	1
White and Black Caribbean	0.3%	1
Other Mixed	0.5%	2
Unknown	0.0%	0
Prefer not to say	8.5%	31

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Prefer to self-describe	0.5%	2
Total		**364**

The data showed that:

- 76.6% of the respondents identified their ethnicity as White British.
- 4.7% of the respondents identified as other White.
- 1.6% of the respondents identified as Indian.
- 8.5% of people preferred not to say with 0.5% preferring to self-describe.

We provided more diverse and inclusive answer options in this consultation. As such, we saw responses from a number of different groups, which enabled individuals to specify more clearly their ethnicity. We have seen a slight uplift in some categories.

The proportion of those that prefer not to state their ethnicity has decreased compared to the 2020 consultation. This is positive as this shows people either felt more able to describe themselves in the categories offered or were more willing to do so.

Census data on ethnicity shows that 80% of Berkshire residents identify their ethnicity as White and ONS data shows that 13% of Berkshire identify their ethnicity as Asian/Asian British. It is challenging to compare this data to our own response rate as we provided more detailed response categories in comparison to the Census ethnicity options. These categories were consulted upon with our EDI Co-ordinator to ensure good practice. However, we can broadly suggest that our response rate of 71.63% of White British is broadly reflective of our local communities, but there is still work to be done to ensure our response rates reflect the community we serve and to ensure seldom heard groups are engaged in our consultations.

Religion or belief

Which of the following best describes your Religion or belief

Answered: 366   Skipped: 99
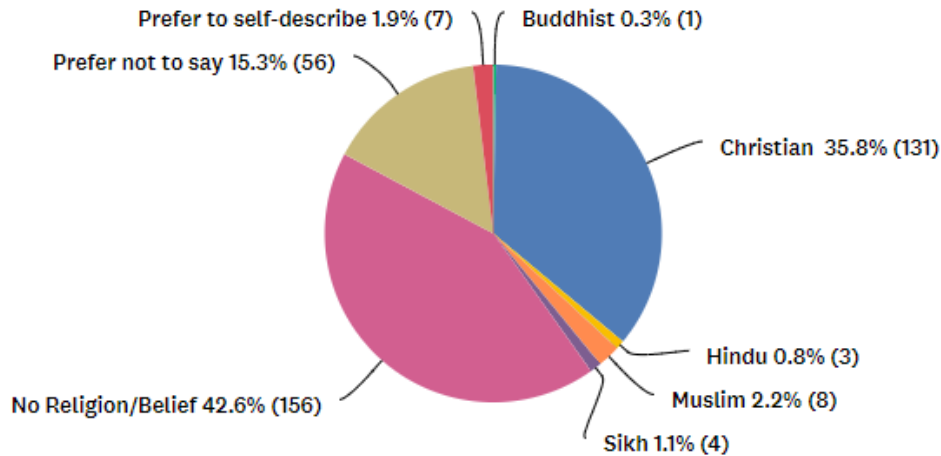
Answer Choices	Response %	Response Number
Buddhist	0.3%	1
Christian	35.8%	131
Hindu	0.8%	3
Jewish	0.0%	0
Muslim	2.2%	8
Sikh	1.1%	4
No Religion/Belief	42.6%	156
Prefer not to say	15.3%	56
Prefer to self-describe	1.9%	7
Total		**366**

The data shows:

- 42.6% do not have a religion or belief.
- 35.8% of respondents are Christian.
- 21.3% of respondents skipped this question.

Data from the 2011-2018 Religion by Local Authority from ONS tells us that 8% of the population of Berkshire identify their religion as Muslim. Within this consultation, we received 2.2% of responses from this group. Those that identify their religion as Hindu comprise 4% of Berkshire's population, again indicating that individuals from these groups are not proportionally represented in this consultation.

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This suggests that in the future, RBFRS needs to ensure appropriate targeted engagement, and consideration of how reflective this is of diversity in specific areas of the County, to better represent the views of the community we serve. However, the response rate from those identifying as Muslim has improved on the 2020 consultation where no responses were received.

Disability

Do you consider yourself to have a disability?

Answered: 366   Skipped: 99
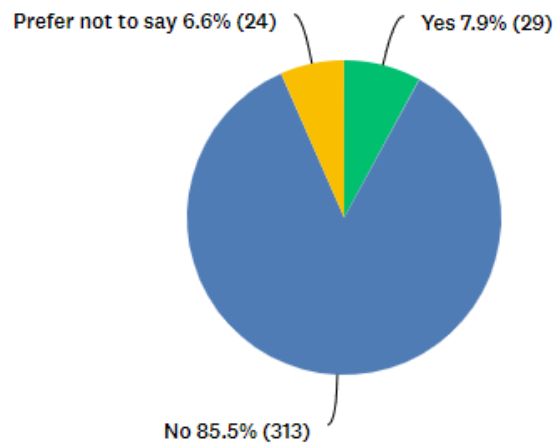
Answer Choices	Response %	Response Number
Yes	7.9%	29
No	85.5%	313
Prefer not to say	6.6%	24
Total		**366**

The data showed that:

- 85.5% considered themselves as not having a disability.
- 7.9% considered themselves as having a disability.
- 6.6% preferred not to say.

In comparison to our previous consultation, we collected this data in the same way and the data suggests there has been an increase in respondents with a disability.

Data from the 2011 Census tells us that 7.32% of Berkshire residents have some limitations on their day-to-day activities. The percentage responses received and the Census data are broadly similar. For future consultation activity, this data has highlighted the continued need to work towards a more representative response from those who identify as having a disability and that we may focus our engagement strategy to encourage more participation from this group.

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Gender Identification at Birth

Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

Answered: 365   Skipped: 100
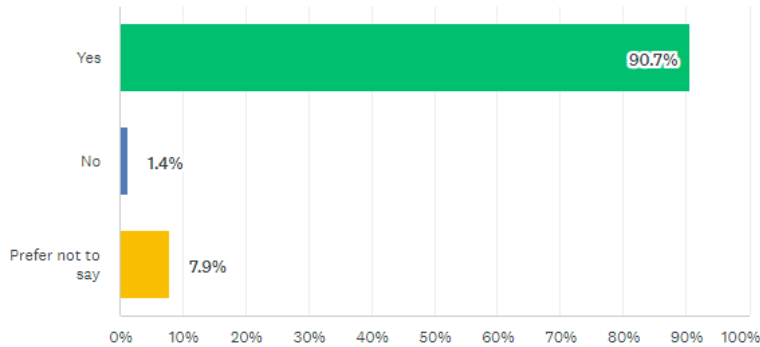
Answer Choices	Response %	Response Number
Yes	90.7%	331
No	1.4%	5
Prefer not to say	7.9%	29
Total		**365**

The data shows:

- 90.7% of the respondents identify themselves with their gender at birth.
- 7.9% respondents preferred not to say.
- 1.4% of respondents stated that they did not identify as the same gender as at birth.

This measure has not been used in previous consultations and the Census data, which will include this information will not be published until later in 2022 so there is no comparative measure available.

Gender Identity

Which of the following best describes your gender identity

Answered: 365   Skipped: 100
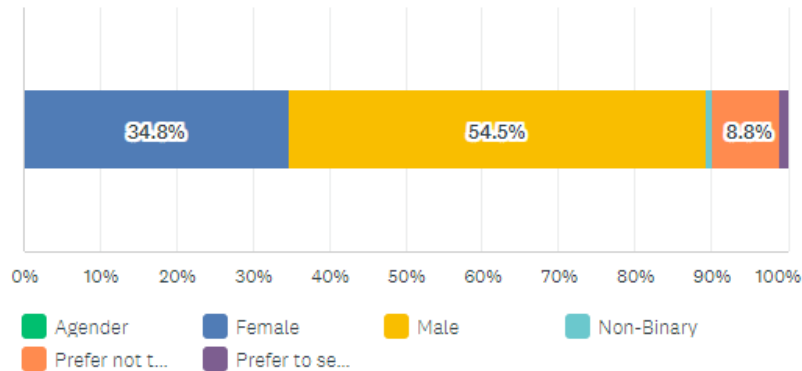
Answer Choices	Response %	Response Number
Agender	0.0%	0
Female	34.8%	127
Male	54.5%	199
Non-Binary	0.8%	3
Prefer not to say	8.8%	32
Prefer to self-describe	1.1%	4
Total		**365**

The data shows:

- 54.5% of respondents were male with females comprising the second highest amount of responses at 34.8%.
- 8.8% of respondents preferred to not provide a gender descriptor.
- 0.8% of respondents described themselves as non-binary.
- 1.1% of respondents chose to self-describe.

ONS data from 2020 estimates that the population of Berkshire is roughly a 50/50 split of male and female. In this consultation, the proportion of overall responses from women was not representative, and is 7.9% lower than the previous consultation. Improvement in this area should be sought in future consultations.

We didn't have any responses from non-binary respondents in our last consultation, so it is positive to see an increase in this area. Those that prefer not say are broadly similar to our last consultation.
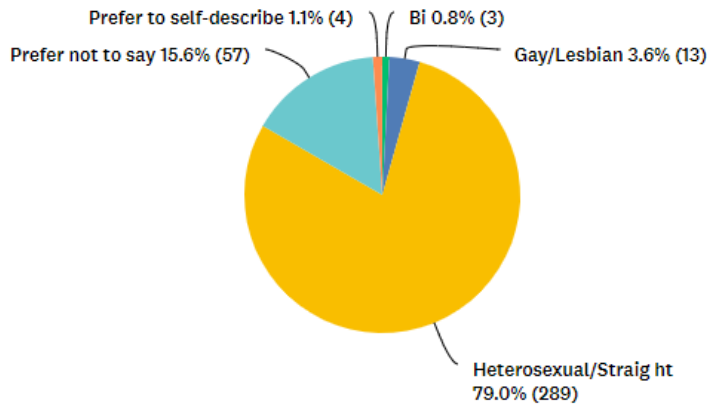
The descriptors used in this consultation differed from previous consultations and was based on best practice advice provided by Stonewall.

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Sexual Orientation

Which of the following best describes your Sexual Orientation?

Answered: 366   Skipped: 99

Answer Choices	Response %	Response Number
Bi	0.8%	3
Gay/Lesbian	3.6%	13
Heterosexual/Straight	79.0%	289
Prefer not to say	15.6%	57
Prefer to self-describe	1.1%	4
Total		**366**

The data shows:

- 79.0% of respondents were heterosexual/straight.
- 3.5% described themselves as gay/lesbian and 0.8% as bi.
- 1.1% preferred to self-describe.
- Of the total respondents 15.6% preferred not to say.

Compared to the last consultation, we have seen a 333% increase in the respondent category of gay/lesbian which is encouraging, with the proportion of respondents in the heterosexual/straight category experiencing a 2% point drop. The remaining categories are broadly the same.

Government data from 2019 suggests that 93.7% of the UK population identify their sexuality as heterosexual,[2] 1.6% identify as gay/lesbian, 1.1% identify as bisexual, 0.7% as 'other' and 3.0% did not want respond. In comparison, the data we collected from this consultation appears

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2 Office of National Statistics – Sexual Orientation UK

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reflective of the national data set with a higher than average response from those identifying as gay/lesbian.

Summary and Next Steps

RBFRS will continue to review its consultation methods to ensure we communicate with our stakeholders in an effective and meaningful way. We welcome any feedback you may have, so please email consultations@rbfrs.co.uk with any suggestions.

On 28 April 2022, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority will conscientiously considered the outcomes of this report. The chosen option will be implemented in summer 2022.

Appendix A

This is the raw data comparison of EDI data from this consultation against the responses from the 2020 CRMP Strategy Consultation. Categories were improved for this consultation. The differences can be seen in the comparison with any categories with a grey box updated since the last consultation.

Response Capacity

	AFA Consultation	CRMP Strategy consultation
RBFRS staff	28.1%	38.0%
Resident of Royal Berkshire	41.7%	44.1%
Business owner	6.0%	1.1%
On behalf of an organisation or group	12.0%	8.4%
Work in Berkshire	8.7%	3.4%
Other	3.5%	4.9%

Age

	AFA Consultation		CRMP Strategy consultation
Under 16	0%		
16-24	4.4%	25 and under	4.9%
25-34	18.1%	26-35	18.4%
35-44	26.0%	36-45	27.4%
45-54	28.7%	46-55	25.2%
55-64	15.6%	56-65	15.0%
65+	7.1%	65 and over	9.0%

Sexuality

	AFA Consultation	CRMP Strategy consultation
Bi	0.8%	1.1%
Gay/Lesbian	3.5%	
Gay man		0.0%
Lesbian/gay woman		1.1%
Heterosexual/straight	79.0%	81.1%
Prefer not to say	15.6%	16.1%
Prefer to self-describe	1.1%	0.4%
Skipped	99	42

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Religion

	AFA Consultation	CRMP Strategy consultation
Christian	35.8%	39.2%
Buddhist	0.3%	1.1%
Hindu	0.8%	0.4%
Jewish	0.0%	0.0%
Muslim	2.2%	0.0%
Sikh	1.1%	1.5%
No religion or belief	42.6%	39.5%
Prefer not to say	15.3%	17.5%
Prefer to self-describe	1.9%	0.8%
Skipped	99	39

Gender

	AFA Consultation	CRMP Strategy consultation
Agender	0.0%	0.0%
Female	34.8%	41.8%
Gender fluid		0.0%
Male	54.5%	49.4%
Non-binary	0.8%	0.4%
Prefer not to say	8.8%	8.0%
Prefer to self-describe	1.1%	0.4%
Skipped	100	39

Ethnicity

	AFA Consultation	CRMP Strategy consultation
White British	76.6%	
White Irish	1.6%	0.0%
Other white	4.7%	2.3%
White British/English/ Welsh/Scottish/NI		79.3%
Gypsy/Irish traveller		0.0%
Black or Black British African		0.0%
Black or Black British Caribbean		0.8%
Black or Black British other		0.0%
Black African	0.0%	
Black Caribbean	0.5%	
Other black	0.5%	
Bangladeshi	0.3%	

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Chinese	0.3%	
Indian	1.6%	
Pakistani	1.4%	
Other Asian	1.1%	
Asian or Asian British Indian		1.5%
Asian or Asian British Pakistani		0.0%
Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi		0.0%
Asian or Asian British Chinese		0.4%
Asian or Asian British other		0.4%
White and Asian	1.0%	0.4%
White and black African	0.3%	0.0%
White and black Caribbean	0.3%	1.1%
Other mixed	0.5%	0.4%
Unknown	0.0%	0.0%
Prefer not to say	8.5%	13.0%
Prefer to self-describe	0.5%	0.4%

Disability

	AFA Consultation	CRMP Strategy consultation
No	85.5%	86.5%
Yes	7.9%	6.8%
Prefer not to say	6.6%	6.8%
Skipped	99	40

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