

# Review of Involvement – South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

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The Authority is good at involving partners and communities but needs to strengthen its evaluation to demonstrate the positive impact of its work.

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# Summary report

## The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015

- 1 The Well-being of Future Generations Act (the 'Act') requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other, and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. The Act also puts in place a 'sustainable development principle' which tells those public bodies covered by the Act how to go about meeting their duty.
- 2 Public bodies need to make sure that when making their decisions they consider the impact they could have on people living their lives in Wales both now and in the future. There are five things that public bodies need to think about to show that they have applied the sustainable development principle. These are set out in **Exhibit 1**. Following these ways of working will help public bodies to work together better, avoid repeating past mistakes and tackle some of the long-term challenges facing Wales.

### Exhibit 1 – the sustainable development principle and the five ways of working



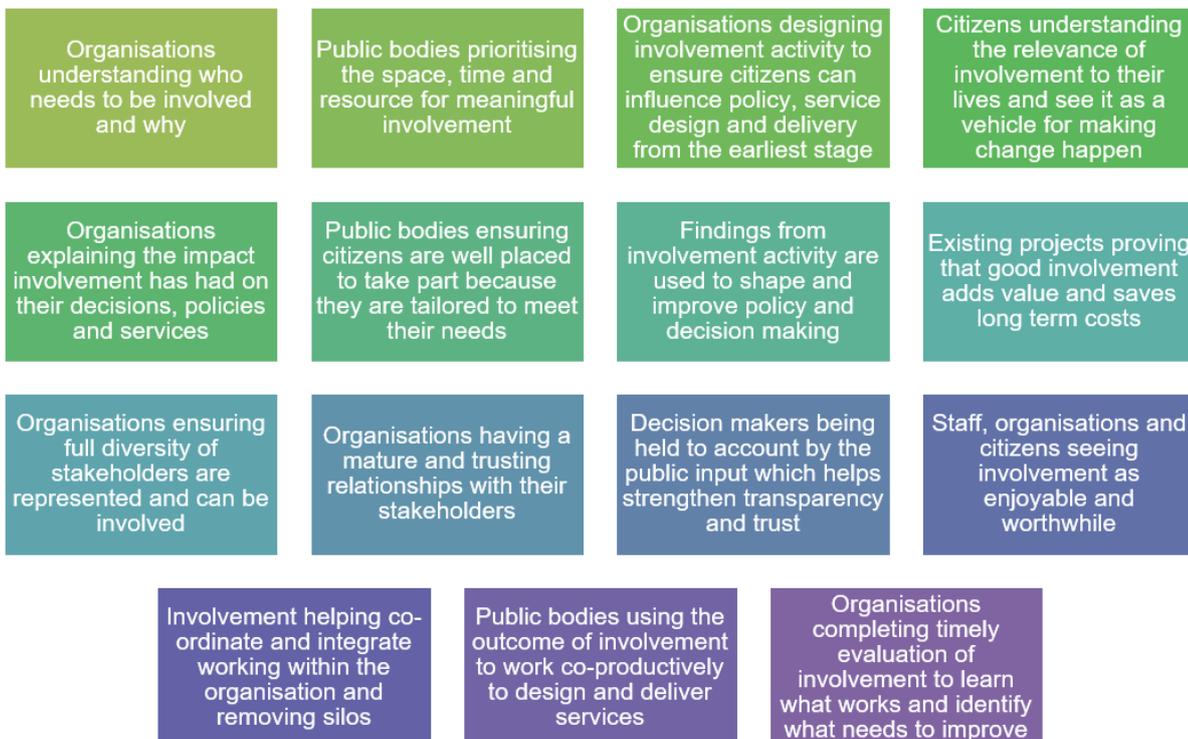
Source: Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 – [The Essentials](#)

## Involvement

- 3 Involvement is about having rich and meaningful conversations with the people in their community, finding out what matters to them, and reflecting that in the decisions that Authorities take. Involvement requires organisations to be open to influence from citizens and stakeholders, moving to a culture of ‘working with’ rather than ‘doing to’. In contrast to consultation, involvement approaches work with people at earlier stages, such as helping to identify issues and potential solutions, and being supported to remain involved right throughout design, implementation and evaluation processes.
- 4 Drawing on our most recent feedback presentation considered to the Fire and Rescue Authority’s (the ‘Authority’) Executive Panel on 9 September 2019, the Future Generations Commissioner for Wales’ [Journey Checker](#) and the [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#) developed by Participation Cymru, **Exhibit 2** summarises the characteristics of an organisation with an effective approach to involvement.

### Exhibit 2 – the characteristics of a public body which has an effective approach to involvement

Effective involvement is embodied by...



- 5 Authorities should therefore set their agenda by listening to people, meaningfully involving them throughout the decision-making process, and being open to real change as a result. It is vital that activities and mechanisms for involving people are appropriately planned, monitored and reported, so they can be developed, challenged or championed. Ensuring that staff and organisations have the necessary skills, structures as well as time and resources to involve the public effectively is vital. This ensures that public services in Wales reflect what is important to the public and their needs, rather than what we may traditionally think works best.

## Scope of our audit

- 6 Given the challenges for public bodies in embodying the sustainable development principle, we have on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales reviewed the Authority's approach and management of involving stakeholders when proposing service and policy changes, and in the design of activities. We undertook a more detailed look at how the Authority is involving stakeholders in developing the new Strategic Equality Plan 2020-25 and in planning public engagement events such as fire station open days, the United Kingdom Rescue Organisation (UKRO) event in 2018 and Emergency Services event in 2019.

## Our findings

- 7 Overall, we have concluded that **the Authority has a generally good approach to involvement with partners and communities but needs to improve its impact by evaluating current approaches to strengthen future activity**. We came to this conclusion because we found the following.

### **The Authority has an effective approach in engaging staff and partners in its equality and diversity work but could do more to embed learning and strengthen its focus on impact**

- 8 The Authority has adopted a clear strategic policy on communications, consultation and engagement – known as Corporate Policy 4. This policy is now fully integrated into the Authority's Strategic Plan theme/wellbeing Objective 3: Engage and Communicate. Progress on the 22 supporting actions relating to involvement are reported via the Business Management Information System (BMIS). The Authority is increasing its use and monitoring of social media which is now being used as an engagement tool.
- 9 The Authority has formed a Consultation and Engagement Group (CEG) which acts as an engagement forum and a learning hub to strengthen its corporate approach to involvement can be enhanced. Its first task is to develop and maintain

an Engagement Toolkit, to enable and support those within the wider organisation to undertake engagement activity in a consistent manner.

- 10 The Authority knows who to involve in developing policy work and has integrated its four partner stakeholder registers into one. The single register has been assessed and mapped alongside the latest lists of Public Services Board (PSB) stakeholders. The Authority now has 384 identified stakeholders, and this forms a regular online forum that is used to inform and consult on a range of policies and safety information. A wider range of stakeholders are now involved including all housing providers, and a single point of contact for all councils has been agreed.
- 11 The Authority has a number of positive examples on involvement activity with staff, partners and citizens. For example:
  - involving 2000 frontline staff in policy changes and undertaking station level engagement events. Recent improvements include the use of two-way remote cloud based video conferencing which helps staff in more remote locations attend meetings.
  - using the results of evaluation of three years of work on its crimes and consequences project, and work with schools, scouts, and universities and involving 3,400 young people in developing both the measures in Child Poverty Strategy 2019-2022 and in the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-25.
  - opening of a community engagement hub at Malpas fire station, a space for collaboration with partners and engagement with young people.
  - targeting prevention activities to those that are vulnerable using historic incidents and information from partners and learning from previous Safe and Well visits. This information is run through the Authority's vulnerability risk matrix known as RIDGE to ensure the Authority is providing safety advice to those that need it most.
  - employing two dedicated engagement officers who actively engage and involve known vulnerable people and their representative groups in consultations and undertaking early involvement work with key partners including Stonewall and Mind Cymru to shape its strategic approach and accompanying actions. This resulted in a better understanding of the needs and rights of those who share protected characteristics.
  - actively working with local authorities, charities, health bodies, and other organisations to combine resources to integrate involvement activity and reduce 'consultation fatigue'. Examples include joint consultation on area plans and other public bodies signposting the Authority's online consultation on its Strategic Equality Plan 2020-25 to gain interest.
  - pre-consultation that led to the Authority's annual improvement objectives being created. This pre-consultation along with Senior Management Team planning days led to the creation of longer-term Strategic Objectives and annual improvement objectives for 2020-21 being formed. These were then

consulted on during the formal 12-week consultation including the design of the Authority's Safer Together Survey.

- the Authority's Safer Together Survey was designed to seek the opinions of staff, the public and stakeholders about what it can do to improve the Service over the longer term. It identified what key changes the Authority should make along with areas it should focus less attention on. The Authority received 132 responses. This resulted in a much stronger corporate focus on climate change and prevention of refuse fires.

- 12 Better involvement of staff and supervisors in equality and diversity work is resulting in improvements to operational training and recruitment. For example, firefighters are more informed about dealing with casualties from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and the learning needs of staff with autism are better considered.
- 13 Complaints, comments, media coverage and postings on social media are evaluated by the Authority and learning points shared internally. Frequent complaint issues are reviewed and used to shape and deliver training on issues such as driving safely in rural areas and consideration of pets in emergencies.
- 14 Better involvement of service users and digital content experts is resulting in more relevant communications. The Authority's Website and corporate Facebook page is now more of an interactive community resource and is not just about information giving. The Service's Facebook page currently has 22,000 followers and the Service's Twitter account has over 26,000 followers thanks to the proactive way the Authority uses social media.
- 15 The FRAs Combined Impact Risk Assessment 2019 integrates the equality impact assessment and considers long term and involvement issues including 'evidence that you have involved interested parties and stakeholders especially those representing the protected characteristics'. This assessment identifies who it needs to involve in developing policies, making changes and improving services.
- 16 Welsh language is more effectively promoted with Welsh pages on the Authority website receiving 36,842 hits from 22,358 visitors. Welsh Language courses are offered to all employees on an annual basis and 118 employees have Welsh Language Skills above level 4 and an additional 29 staff have enrolled on Welsh language courses during this year.
- 17 The Authority is using feedback and is making good use of plain language, other languages, and 'easy read' versions of policies and information. Staff visit other Fire and Rescue Authorities such as West Midlands and Staffordshire to learn about good practices elsewhere on equality, community involvement, and staff training. As a result, the Authority is well placed to deliver further improvement.
- 18 Defining 'people' to involve with is challenging because involvement is not just about the people who live in the Authority area, the businesses which work in the Authority area and key local Authority partners but also the wider population. Consequently, the Authority needs to consider people who travel to and through the Authority area.

- 19 However, despite the good quality evaluation of the recent Safer Together project the Authority recognises there is more scope to feedback learning from involvement and share this with partners and the public by creating a 'You Said, We Did' summary. For example, the key findings from website testing and learning from complaints and commendations. We also think there is scope to involve young people and partners in the design and content of the website and in social media communication to extend reach and impact.
- 20 The Authority has many performance measures on involvement, but these are mostly focused on judging inputs and outputs not impact and outcomes. For example, 22 out of 25 of the BMIS actions are numerical outputs and do not relate to how to demonstrate the impact of communication, consultation, engagement and involvement. Actions could include how they felt before and then after being asked or informed.

## **The Authority delivers and coordinates with partners a wide range of important local, regional and national community events**

- 21 The Authority has a well-co-ordinated programme of station open days linked to national and local safety and community events such as White Ribbon<sup>1</sup>, International Days<sup>2</sup>, road safety, and co-ordinated across Public Service Board areas. In addition, the Authority hosts a series of events and involves partners in joint community safety campaigns. The Authority's social media activity and website is a good showcase for these events. The website community events tab takes users to the social media pages and lists various community events with tagged safety advice which is a good way of reinforcing prevention messages.
- 22 Community events are integrating elements of involvement, behaviour change and prevention activity. The 2019 evaluation of engagement activities at the United Kingdom Rescue Organisations (UKRO) event finds a good variety of engagement activities including 'Happy or Not' terminals. These terminals enabled the collection of public feedback to designated questions through engaging with a highly visible touch-button display of four different smiley faces of different colours. There were 1,590 responses recorded by the seven terminals during the three-day period. As a result, those people who participated felt better informed and involved.
- 23 In September 2019 South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, South Wales Police and the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust joined together to host their very first 999 Weekend at Cardiff Bay. The event coincided with the 50th anniversary

<sup>1</sup> White Ribbon Campaign, <https://www.whiteribbon.org.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> United Nations International Days, <https://www.un.org/en/sections/observances/international-days/index.html>

celebrations of South Wales Police, and saw a full programme of family activity, demonstrations and displays staged at the water side venue.

- 24 UKRO in 2018 and Emergency Services Weekend December 2019 events used as a tool to engage on the corporate plan and policy work. Over 20,000 visitors visited UKRO in Cardiff Bay and 18,000 to the 999 emergency services weekend. Over 1,300 and 400 consultation responses were received respectively. As a result, the new strategic corporate plan 2020-25 has stronger emphasis on environmental issues as a result of UKRO engagement.
- 25 Learning from hosting community events has shaped the information the Authority provides to others. A good range of community safety and self-help guides for event organisers are available on the Authority website including guidance on maintaining business continuity, a guide to making premises safe from fire, event organisers checklists, and fire safety measures for semi-permanent tented structures. Training and safety visits are also available by the community safety team. As a result, there has been a dramatic reduction in emergency calls on bonfire night in the first quarter of 2019-20 and no serious fires at events.

## **The Authority is increasing its capabilities in some key areas but needs to integrate its approaches to ensure it can deliver its long-term aspirations**

- 26 The Authority is increasing its capacity and capabilities in involvement, communications, and data analysis. Communicating with Confidence training and online education games and resources are of notable practice. The games and school resources were developed in close collaboration with local schools and tested by students. Future involvement projects include developing a learning data capture hub where all staff can add information and learning about involvement activity. Better performance data analytics and a database on survey design is also planned.
- 27 We see clear progress with our areas for improvement from last year's audit - in formalising and mapping collaborations, integrating involvement activity, and rationalising policies. Improving the strategic approach to collaborations is progressing and exit strategies are in place for each key partnership. Data sharing with public bodies is improving. For example, data sharing protocols are in place with NHS Wales and energy companies to identify people over 65 years old and living in circumstances that make them vulnerable.
- 28 However, less progress is being made on:
- long-term workforce planning; and
  - evaluation of road safety activity.
- 29 The Authority has scope to link things such as on call firefighter recruitment, volunteer recruitment and leadership development to long-term aspirations, and also to link asset management to the work of other partners.

- 30 However, despite working closely with black and ethnic minority (BME) business owners and diverse community organisations to increase recruitment from BME communities, the Authority does not consistently enable all those who may want to contribute to policy development to do so. In particular through different languages. It needs to do more to widen its appeal and encourage people from more economically or socially deprived areas, including those who may be on low or no incomes, to get involved.
- 31 Consequently, the Authority recognises it could do more to involve hard-to-reach groups, it needs to be able to demonstrate its consideration of whether and how it involves community groups such as those outlined above. Working through representative groups across the local area and the wider South Wales region will help the Authority find an efficient way to engage with overarching representative groups which can provide insight and challenge on the effectiveness of current approaches to involvement with hard-to-reach groups.

## Proposals for improvement

- 32 Rather than list proposals for improvement we have produced a self-assessment for the Authority’s staff and members to use in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of its current approach to involvement. This self-assessment can be used at both a corporate strategic level but also on individual projects to judge how well the Authority is doing and where change is needed to ensure involvement is mainstreamed and made sustainable. We expect the Authority to use this tool to evaluate its current performance and to identify how it can improve its work.

### Exhibit 3: self-assessment

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
We have a strategic approach and corporate framework for involvement which directs activity			
We understand who needs to be involved and why			
We prioritise the space, time and resources for meaningful involvement			
We have designed our involvement activity to ensure that citizens and partners can influence our policies and plans			

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
We have designed our involvement activity to ensure that citizens and partners can influence how we design and deliver services			
We have made clear to citizens and partners how their involvement will help improve their lives			
We have made clear to citizens and partners how their involvement with us will result in change happening			
We explain the impact involvement has had on our decisions, policies and services			
We tailor our approach to involvement to ensure all citizens and partners can take part			
We use the findings from involvement activity to shape and improve policy and decision making			
We can demonstrate that our approach to involvement saves money and avoids duplication with the similar activities carried out by our partners			

Action	We do this well on every occasion and do not need to improve our approach at all	We do this well some of the time but there are opportunities to improve our approach	We are not good at this and need to improve our approach
Our approach to involvement allows our partners to hold us to account for the decisions we make			
Our approach to involvement allows citizens to hold us to account for the decisions we make			
Our approach to involvement is enjoyable and worthwhile			
Our approach to involvement helps us to integrate our work to avoid silos			
We use the outcome of our involvement to work co-productively to design and deliver services			
We undertake timely evaluation of involvement to learn what works			
We undertake timely evaluation of involvement to identify what needs to improve			



# Appendix 1

## Examples of involvement approaches in UK Fire and Rescue Authorities

Other fire and rescue authorities in the UK are involving their stakeholders strategically and where this works well, they tend to do this regularly and collaboratively.

In 2019 the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service published an independent analysis of the responses to the 'Your Service, Your Voice' consultation<sup>3</sup> about the transformation of the service and closer operational integration with the Scottish Ambulance Service. Overall the exercise generated in 1563 responses, the majority of which were from individuals, plus 32 public service partners, and 85 other organisations. Methods included a well-planned series of 'warm up' public information exercises explaining what the service does and how the public will benefit from change. Three years' worth of consultation findings and complaints were also reviewed to find any trends. Consideration of people living in different areas and with protected characteristics was also considered, and representative groups were involved at early stage to design the exercise. A key finding is that a sustained focus on prevention is the best way of protecting individuals. However, the exercise also finds that whilst staff are open to change, the public are more sceptical and see proposals as propping up shortfalls in other public services.

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Authority conducts regular engagement activity rather than 'one off' set piece consultations. An annual calendar of engagement activity is shared with partners and activity is co-ordinated and integrated with others where possible. Ideas and proposals are regularly tested through the Authority's Online forum and in dedicated community safety sessions of the county council led Citizen panel. All "Ask the Fire Authority" sessions, open days, and roadshows in the area have a theme based on a corporate objective and results are reviewed independently by a regional reference panel of experts, plus the local Police and Crime Commissioner. Regular surveys are carried out on themes rather than policies. A series of Consultation Principles are set out on the Authorities website<sup>4</sup>.

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority regularly engages with its communities to give them the opportunity to say what they want from the Authority. West Yorkshire engages early before they develop plans, sharing data and intelligence with partners on designing involvement activity. The Authority also targets underrepresented groups such Travellers, and its involvement work is integrated into its inclusion and diversity activity. The Authority carries out regular online surveys and evaluations on the quality of service; satisfaction, complaints; school visits; Safe & Well visits; and changes to fire cover. The Authority finds that people may not know enough about the wider role of the fire and rescue service. This makes it difficult for stakeholders to comment about something they know little about. In response the Authority has produced an interactive online guide and video about the services provided by the Authority<sup>5</sup>. Results of public consultation and what changes as a result is published online.

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Your service Your voice, <https://firescotland.citizenspace.com/sfrs-communications/your-service-your-voice/>

<sup>4</sup> East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service, Getting involved, [www.esfrs.org/contact-us/getting-involved/](http://www.esfrs.org/contact-us/getting-involved/)

<sup>5</sup> West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service, Customer Service Guide, [www.wyfs.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CS-NFG023-CustomerServiceGuide-1.pdf](http://www.wyfs.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CS-NFG023-CustomerServiceGuide-1.pdf)





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