



**DORSET & WILTSHIRE  
FIRE AND RESCUE  
AUTHORITY**

Item 26/07 Appendix 9

MEETING	Members Working Group
DATE OF MEETING	6 November 2025
SUBJECT OF THE REPORT	Stakeholder Management and Public Consultation
STATUS OF REPORT	Not for publication
PURPOSE OF REPORT	For review and to approve
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	<p>This report outlines the high-level stakeholder management plan and public consultation approach under the Authority's Best Value Duty, should the Authority approve any proposals for station closure.</p> <p>It provides Members the assurance that the process will meet statutory consultation requirements, including compliance with the Gunning Principles, and will be supported by independent oversight from an external provider. Drawing from the debates had by Members in each of the working groups, it identifies the strategic considerations, risks, timetabling, resourcing and budget required to undertake effective and meaningful consultation through a structured engagement timetable from January to June 2026.</p> <p>Upon Member approval, this plan will be included as an appendix to the Station Closure paper for the full Authority meeting on 12 February 2026.</p>
RISK ASSESSMENT	<p>Failure to deliver a comprehensive and robust public consultation process could present a risk to the Authority in their legal compliance and duty to consult.</p> <p>Consideration of all stakeholders and activity required to communicate and engage would be reputationally damaging for the Authority and present challenges if this is not carried out in a consistent and robust way.</p>

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COMMUNITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	Being completed for the consultation process. This will ensure that the impacts for equality and diversity and vulnerable groups will be incorporated into consultation material and the approach being taken.
PEOPLE IMPACT ASSESSMENT	Being completed for the consultation process.
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT	These have been completed for each proposal as part of the project.
BUDGET IMPLICATIONS	<p>To provide Members the assurance for an effective public consultation process, an external provider will provide independence to the process and externally validate this and the stakeholder management plan.</p> <p>The provider will also develop and facilitate the consultation activity within communities alongside Members and Officers and provide Members with a report of the consultation finding to inform their decision making.</p> <p>An additional budget requirement of £60K for this service is anticipated and this has been secured.</p>
RECOMMENDATION	<p>Members are asked to consider and approve:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. the stakeholder management plan and programme for public consultation.</li> </ol>
BACKGROUND PAPERS	None
APPENDIX	None
REPORT ORIGINATOR AND CONTACT	<p>Name: Vikki Shearing, Assistant Chief Officer, Director of Corporate Services</p> <p>Email: <a href="mailto:vikki.shearing@dwfire.org.uk">vikki.shearing@dwfire.org.uk</a></p> <p>Tel no: 07880712319</p>

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 A combined Fire and Rescue Authority falls within the definition of a best value authority under section 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. Under section 3 of the Act a best value authority must make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. For the purpose of deciding how to fulfil this duty the Fire and Rescue Authority must consult in the manner described in Section 3 (2) of the Act.
- 1.2 A decision to close a fire station falls within this requirement and as such public consultation must take place.
- 1.3 This report provides a high-level stakeholder management plan as well as a mechanism and timetable for public consultation. It is recommended to Members that both are coordinated by the DWFRS in-house Communication and Engagement team with an external consultation provider supporting Officers and Members to deliver the activity associated with public consultation.

## 2. Stakeholder management

- 2.1 Any decision for station closures by the Authority is likely to present negative impacts if stakeholder communications and engagement is not managed appropriately, both for our communities and staff and potentially for our partners. This places the reputation of the Authority and Service at risk.
- 2.2 All communication will be carried out in a consistent, transparent, inclusive and accessible way. To aid this commitment, a stakeholder mapping exercise has been carried out for both internal and external stakeholders, identifying risks and opportunities against each. At a high level, the outcome of this analysis seeks to deliver the following approach up to the point of consultation. Further plans have been considered for the June decision, and this will be included in the February Authority paper:

### 2.3 Table 1

Stakeholder	Risk	Activity	When
Fire Authority	Not adequately informed to support communication and engagement activity	All Members seminar – face to face  Additional support as needed for FRA meetings during consultation period  Attendance at public meetings during consultation	21 January 2026  13 February – 15 May 2026

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Impacted station staff	Staff morale Concern for job security Lack of understanding of rationale	Confidential face to face briefing of proposed stations Phone call to GM confirming FRA decision Face to face meetings and online staff briefings	After January seminar – week commencing 26 January 2026 After FRA February meeting During consultation
Representative Bodies	Funding Ability to support their members Clarity of rationale	Confidential online briefing of proposed stations Call to confirm FRA decision Joint Working Group	After January seminar After FRA February meeting Pre and during consultation
All Staff	Stability and morale	Online briefings and all staff email Staff email	Week prior to February FRA meeting After the February FRA meeting
Communities	Fear of loss of Service Opposing proposals Lack of understanding rationale	Public consultation events Local FRA Members to support rationale Communicate through social media, website.	Advertise after February FRA meeting and hold throughout consultation period
Local Councillors	Impact of loss of Service in their area - opposing Lack of understanding rationale	Send a briefing sheet to local town councillors/parish councils with member lead. Not attending Area Boards	After the January seminar

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Local MPs	Impact of loss of Service in their area - opposing  Lack of understanding rationale	Briefing from CFO Cole and Chair Cllr Clare Weight	After the January seminar
Local Partners		Letter from CFO Cole to the Chief Constables in both Police and the PCC's; SWAST, NHS, LA Chief Executives and Leaders	After the January seminar
National		Letter from CFO Cole and where appropriate Chair Cllr Clare Weight to HMI, NFCC, MHCLG	After the January seminar
Media	Increased interest  Lack of information leading to assumptions and negative press	Press statement ready after the January seminar.  Preparation for additional attendance and questions at FRA public meetings  All media requests managed through DWFRS press office	After the January seminar

Table 1 – excerpt from stakeholder management plan

- 2.4 Key points to raise from this exercise are that full confidentiality must be maintained up to the date of the finance seminar on 21 January 2026. After which, the structured activity to communicate and engage with stakeholders will commence and be closely managed.
- 2.5 Consideration needs to be given to the likely increase in media and political interest throughout this process. The detailed plans reflect mitigation activity which includes ensuring all impacted local political representatives are provided an early briefing after the Members seminar in January.
- 2.6 Impacted staff require face to face briefings in advance of papers being published and to be notified immediately after the decision in February. Detailed internal planning is now underway.
- 2.7 Based on lessons learned, a briefing sheet will be provided to local impacted town councillors in advance of the FRA papers being published. It is suggested that a Member lead contact is included on this briefing sheet.

## OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

- 2.8 All media requests must be managed through the DWFRS press office and a review of any media activity, as well as risks and issues, will be covered at the CFO and Chair weekly meetings.
- 2.9 Members will play a pivotal role in the communications and engagement activity and will need to ensure adequate time is allowed for this, in particular the public events being held during the consultation period. Members will be asked in January to allocate Members to locations, where a minimum of two face to face events will be held and one on-line session.
- 2.10 Consideration needs to be given to the likely public interest at all forthcoming FRA public meetings in advance of, during and after public consultation. Additional time will be allocated to coordinate public questions and additional support provided at Local Performance and Scrutiny meetings as required. The location of the Fire Authority in February and June may also need to be reviewed to ensure there is capacity for an expected increase in attendance from the public and other stakeholders.
- 2.11 Contingency planning will be included in the detailed stakeholder management plan to ensure arrangements are in place where there is overwhelming opposition, where media coverage turns significantly negative and/or where a data breach occurs.

### **3. Public Consultation**

- 3.1 The consultation approach will be based on the Gunning Principles, a set of four guidelines that define a fair and lawful public consultation process which means the Authority needs to:
- consult when proposals are still under development and not finalised, before a decision has been made or predetermined.
  - provide stakeholders enough information for them to understand the proposals to enable informed responses
  - provide stakeholders sufficient time to fully engage with the consultation process and provide feedback.
  - demonstrate that feedback received during the consultation has been considered before making a final decision.
- 3.2 To deliver a comprehensive and robust public consultation approach, that meets the Authority's legal requirements, additional resources and skills are required. It is proposed to Members that an external provider is engaged to work alongside the in-house communication and engagement team, commencing after the final Members Working group in December. This demonstrates independence of the process and enables the provider to support the planning as well as directing and delivering our agreed approach.

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3.3 It is also the intention that through engagement with the Consultation Institute we will seek certification of consultation readiness before February's meeting.

3.4 The scope of their work will include:

- Providing independent advice on the approach for consultation – consultation document, survey questions, communication and engagement activity and timetabling.
- Session planning for the consultation events and supporting Members and Officers with these – there is the potential for this activity to include up to 16 face to face sessions and 8 online sessions.
- Hosting the consultation survey
- Producing an interim report and a final report with detailed analysis of the survey results in advance of the meeting of the Authority on 30 June 2026.

#### **4. Mechanisms and timetable for consultation**

4.1 A 13-week consultation will take place using a variety of methods across the Service area and localised as needed to impacted communities.

4.2 The mechanisms for consultation will be developed further but suggest this would involve:

- A single Authority consultation document which outlines the changes being proposed, the reasons why, the impacts, the timetable for consultation and how to get involved in the consultation. The consultation feedback will be based on the proposal as a single option not as a range of options to choose from. There will be the opportunity for feedback not options. The leaflet will need to provide adequate information that supports the basis of each proposal, with localised tailored messaging which acknowledged the impacts to the community using local examples of data for fire cover and response times and providing reassurance of the cover that will continue to be provided.
- Public meetings in the locations of the impacted stations. Work is underway to provisionally hold suitable locations based on the list of stations under review. It is proposed that there are 2 face to face events for each location – one daytime and one evening with additional weekly online sessions, alternating daytime and evening. These will not be location based. Session planning will start with the external provider in December.
- Social media posts to direct feedback to the consultation process on the website.
- A dedicated website page and consultation email address.
- A consultation video to reinforce the messaging in the leaflet.

## OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

- 4.3 All material associated with the public consultation will be assessed against accessibility standards including online communication, electronic processes, paper-based material and face to face sessions.
- 4.4 Participation levels and demographic reach will also be monitored and included in the final report to ensure representation.
- 4.5 Whilst these mechanisms will be managed through the communications and engagement team and supported by the external provider, there will need to be agreement on Member leads and Officer support at planned events.
- 4.6 This timetable is considerate of other political and organisational impacts. Consideration will also be given to how we will communicate the final decision and the results of the consultation process internally and externally.
- 06 November 2025 – Members working group consider and approve stakeholder plan and consultation approach.
  - 09 December 2025 – Members working group sign off station review to take forward recommended stations to full Authority.
  - 11 December 2025 – DWFRS engage with external provider to validate approved approach and conduct further planning for consultation activity.
  - 21 January 2026 – Members seminar - presentation of final proposed stakeholder management plan and consultation programme
  - 26 January 2026 – Initiate stakeholder management plan
  - 12 February 2026 – FRA approval of public consultation.
  - 13 February 2026 - Consultation will commence at 10am, running for 13 weeks.
  - 30 March 2026 – Interim consultation report provided to Chair and Vice-Chair
  - 15 May 2026 – Consultation close at 5pm.
  - 30 June 2026 – Final consultation report provided to FRA meeting

## **5. Governance and Monitoring**

- 5.1 SLT, through the Strategic Communications lead, will manage and monitor the Stakeholder Management Plan on a regular basis and coordinate stakeholder engagement with the Fire Authority, Staff, local leaders, Partners and MPs.
- 5.2 The Strategic Communications lead will ensure all activity is coordinated and delivered against the plan and advise on all written communications to external stakeholders.

## OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

- 5.3 RSP team and Communications and Engagement team to lead on the delivery of the stakeholder management plan.
- 5.4 The external company will ensure independence in the consultation process. They will host the consultation survey and collate consultation responses. Themes will be drawn from the consultation and Members will receive a report of these findings at their June meeting, to help inform their decision making.
- 5.5 The Authority's Monitoring Officer will be consulted to ensure the consultation approach meets the legal requirements for the Authority, to mitigate any risk of judicial review.
- 5.6 The Chair of the Authority will be briefed at each of the weekly Chief and Chair meetings on any activity. They will also have the opportunity to raise any risks to the stakeholder plan and consultation process.
- 5.7 All media interest will be managed centrally through the DWFRS press office function.

## **6. Summary and next steps**

- 6.1 With all of these elements in place, the approach to consultation and stakeholder management provides a robust framework for Members to be assured that reputational, legal and operational risks are being managed, while enabling transparent and meaningful public engagement.
- 6.2 Subject to approval of this approach, including the timetable and resource requirements, the external company will now be used to validate and further support the detailed stakeholder and consultation plans.
- 6.3 Scheduling of activity will begin to ensure this is fully resourced against the timetable and the preparation of consultation material and messaging will also begin. This will be shared with Members at the January seminar to ensure Members are fully supported in this activity. At the seminar there will need to be agreement on the allocation of Members to attend public meetings.
- 6.4 The Stakeholder management plan and Public Consultation programme will be included in the report to Members at the February FRA meeting.