

Crews of three public engagement summary – Nov/Dec 2023

Purpose of engagement

The Service has undergone a project to look to implement crews of three for on-call fire engines from January 1, 2023.

Internal engagement sessions have taken place with face-to-face visits to all on-call fire stations and the Service issued a news release about the change to inform the public.

The Fire Brigades Union are opposing this change with one of the concerns being the moral pressure on firefighters to make a rescue if someone is inside a building that is on fire (as a crew of three they would be unable to enter the property until a backup appliance had arrived).

The move is being made as we believe it will benefit the public and get a fire engine to an incident quicker, and looking at data, in the vast majority of incidents, a crew of three will be able to make a difference by taking action quicker. We therefore decided to engage with local residents to see what they thought of the change. This would give us an indication of how the move will be received, how people will feel if three firefighters turn up to an incident and if they believed, from the explanation given to them, that it was a positive change. This would indicate if we had to do any more communication in the run up to January when the change is implemented.

Methodology

We initially wanted to hold focus groups with residents living in on-call station areas as they are the most affected by this change. This is quite a complex issue and being able to explain it in person we felt would be more beneficial. We commissioned an external supplier to do this for us. Unfortunately, despite a lot of effort on their part, there was very little interest from anyone agreeing to come to the sessions.

We decided to then try a survey.

Having set up a new online community engagement forum (CEF) we sent all those who had signed up so far, a link to a PDF explaining the current situation and what we were planning to change in January. We then added a link to a survey with six questions.

We also decided to try and use our new communication channel NextDoor. This is a social media channel but focused on location. For this we added the information in the PDF to a [web page](#) and linked this and the survey to the post. Following feedback from the initial survey to people in the CEF we changed the structure of one of the questions as it wasn't as it was supposed to be (it was set up as a rating question rather than a one choice question). Therefore, the results from this question with the CEF should be discounted. We also added an option of 'Maybe' to Q4 for the NextDoor survey having also received feedback about this from the CEF group.

It should be noted that:

- All responses were anonymous and both groups could potentially have residents that are former employees so would have more knowledge.
- We did stipulate that current employees were not permitted to respond.
- With NextDoor it is not possible to know who has responded.
- We were conscious of not putting people off responding by making the explanation document too long or asking too many questions. Therefore, this survey was used to get a reaction to the basic principles of the change.

Outcome

We received 40 replies from the CEF group and 147 responses from our Next Door post, totalling 187.

The feedback we received from the different groups is given below. The first question was to ask if they had read the PDF/webpage. All except one person from the Next Door respondents had done so.

2) Do you think this change will benefit residents?

Response option	CEF (40)	Next Door (147)	Total (187)
Yes	28	127	155
No	7	9	16
Don't know	3	6	9
Other	2	5	7

3. If you have dialled 999 requesting the fire service and a crew of three firefighters turned up in the fire engine some minutes later, how would you feel on their arrival?

Response option	Next Door (147)
Very relieved	117
Somewhat relieved	17
Not sure	2
Somewhat concerned	6
Very concerned	2
Other	3

For the CEF responses, 60% (24 out of 40) rated feeling 'Very relieved' as their top option, however the question style had not been set correctly. This was amended for the NextDoor survey.

4. Considering the benefits and the potential risks outlined, do you believe this is a positive change?

Response option	CEF (40)	Next Door (147)	Total (187)
Yes	26	113	139
Maybe	This wasn't an option for this survey	22	22
No	10	9	19
Don't know	4	3	7

5. What is more important to you:

Response option	CEF (40)	Next Door (147)	Total (187)
The number of firefighters on a fire engine	7	7	14
The time it takes for the fire engine to arrive	33	140	173

It should be noted that in the comments section some felt that this question was biased or not enough options were provided as they want a fire engine there quickly but with enough firefighters on it.

6. Anything else you wish to add?

Respondents were able to provide any comment in this response box. Themes include:

- Many with comments that reiterated support for the change
- Many supported the change but only if firefighters will be safe and back-ups were sent
- Some pointing out they were agreeing within the context of the survey but recognising it was more complex, it would depend on the incident and there was more information they may need
- Some making the point we need to recruit more on-call firefighters
- Some disagreeing with the change due to the moral pressure on firefighters
- Some concerned this was cuts related.

The fourth bullet point gives us an opportunity to follow up on this with a survey about on-call recruitment, how we can promote the role more and where we should be advertising it etc. The Media and Communication Team will give this some thought and add this to the survey planner.

Conclusion

The majority of responders see allowing crews of three as a positive change that will benefit residents. They also indicated that the time it took for a fire engine to arrive was more important than the number of firefighters on board.

We fully appreciate that most residents will not understand the complexities of the firefighter role including risk assessments and standard operating procedures and how many firefighters are needed to do things safely – this was just to give an indication of what was of greater importance in their eyes in terms of meeting their expectations and understanding what reaction a crew of three is likely to get when they arrive at an incident.