



**NORTHUMBERLAND FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE
NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CONSULTATION FOR RE-LOCATION OF
ALNWICK COMMUNITY FIRE STATION FINAL REPORT**

23rd October 2013 to 18th December 2013

Northumberland
COUNTY COUNCIL

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Foreword

Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service has an excellent track record for the work it has done to improve community safety through prevention programmes and community engagement activities, whilst also still delivering a high performing and responsive emergency service.

During these difficult financial times we have to continue to adapt and innovate in order to ensure that we make the best use of the limited financial resources we have, whilst still ensuring that we safeguard the quality and standards of such vitally important public services. As the Deputy Leader of the Council part of my 'portfolio' of services I am responsible for includes Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service. I am therefore absolutely delighted to support this development, which is such an innovative way to provide a state of the art service to the community in Alnwick and the surrounding area. Bringing these two developments together as a single integrated facility helps reduce costs and secure efficiencies, offers the opportunity to provide modern up to date facilities to the benefit of the local community and staff, and will ensure we are well placed to continue to improve the services we provide to the local community through better and smarter ways of working.

It feel very passionately about the need to make sure that communities have the opportunity to shape and influence what happens in their local area. The consultation on the proposed development of a new Community Fire Station in Alnwick has provided such an opportunity and demonstrates our commitment to work with local communities so that they have their say over important matters that affect them now and in the future. I will ensure that the feedback received from this consultation exercise is carefully considered and taken on board when deciding what the next steps should be.



Cllr Dave Ledger - Deputy Leader of Northumberland County Council



Alex Bennett – Chief Fire Officer

Executive summary

This executive summary explains the consultation process and presents key findings of the public consultation on the proposed re-location of Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service's (NFRS) Fire Station in Alnwick. The consultation was with regard to the Community Fire Station element however it is recognised that it forms part of the move to the new 'Super Depot' as part of Northumberland County Council (NCC). The research was undertaken by NFRS under guidance of the Policy and Research Team of NCC.

Combinations of quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. Quantitative research was in the form of the collection of data in a survey made available on the NCC website and is concerned with establishing the proportions of responses to questions about the proposal. Qualitative research was based on attendance at key community groups by senior officers where the proposal was presented and debated, and was used to explore the 'why', and/or the reasons behind the proposal. In short, it adds more depth, but is not used statistically.

Initially the method to engage with members of the public was via a press release in the local newspaper the Alnwick Gazette which was supported by information on the County Council website with details of the proposal explained in the 'Consultation Strategy' with an on-line questionnaire, in addition to this there was an open event held at Alnwick Fire Station.

Secondly, the Service corresponded with key stakeholders and groups in the Alnwick area offering senior officers to attend and explain the proposal with attendance at The North Area Team, the Town and Parish Council, Local Multi Agency Problem Solving group and the Alnwick Planning & Development Group. Further correspondence seeking views was sent to Partner and Voluntary organisations as well as the Chamber of Trade.

Overall it seems that a clear majority of residents in responding to the web-site survey supported the proposal and priorities of NFRS. However it must be noted that only a limited number of residents responded to the survey and, given the significant coverage of the proposal in the local media, it is considered that the low response indicates the public chose not to respond to the consultation and were not concerned about the proposed relocation of the Fire Station to respond to the proposals. In addition to this the Service's attendance at key local groups such as the North Area Committee and the Town Council demonstrated high levels of support and encouragement to the proposal with regard to its benefits to Alnwick and the local Area.

There was some indication from a couple of respondents with regard to concerns of locating the new Community Fire Station away from its existing site and potentially increasing response times along with the new Community Fire Station being away from the Community.

Consultation Aims & Objectives

NFRS as part of NCC and under scope of Depot Rationalisation intended to raise awareness and understanding of the relocation of Alnwick Fire Station to support NFRS & NCC Strategic Aims, and its role in contributing to the prevention of injuries and deaths, and driving down risk in the communities of Alnwick and Northumberland. Therefore the consultation was designed in accordance with advice from NCC Policy and Research Team and Cabinet Office guidance and intended to:-

- To ensure service personnel understand how the changes will impact upon them;
- That consultation is good quality, provides value for money, and presents in a professional and efficient manner;
- That NCC will provide opportunities for members of the community and personnel to contribute to the development of the project with regard to NFRS based on evidence and information provided;
- That NFRS & NCC will demonstrate that they have taken into account the views and concerns of all its stakeholders and allowed their knowledge and experience to influence the decision-making process;
- To meet with the Code of Practice Consultation (2012);
- To ensure that the consultation on NFRS Strategic Improvements to NFRS are kept separate to the Planning Applications;
- To ensure that the proposals serve the needs of Northumberland in maximising Community Well-Being by supporting Partnership working whilst meeting Efficiencies;
- To address the consensus view of staff, stakeholders and the community and incorporate these in the proposed plans.

Methodology

Combinations of quantitative and qualitative research methods were used. Quantitative research was in the form of the collection of data in the on-line survey made available on NCC's website and is concerned with establishing the proportions of responses to set questions on the area being researched. Qualitative research was based on attendance at key community groups where there was presentations by senior officers and debate on the proposal, and was used to explore the 'why', or the reasons behind responses to a quantitative survey. In short, it added more depth, but was not used statistically.

Stage 1: Pre consultation was carried out with respective key groups and stakeholders.

Stage 2: Formal consultation commenced 23rd October 2013, concluding 18th December 2013, with a Press Release in the Alnwick Gazette to raise awareness throughout the local area of the key proposal and to direct members of the public and other interested parties to the web-site for the reasons behind the proposal with a questionnaire and survey for those who wished to respond. The press release made the front page of the Alnwick Gazette and was also covered in the Journal newspaper, both of which have good circulations within Alnwick and across Northumberland. The web-site was kept live during the consultation period with e-mail or questionnaire accessibility to those who wished to respond. This also was linked to a public open event held at Alnwick Fire Station 6th November 2013.

Stage 3: Correspondence was issued in accordance with the 'Consultation Strategy' available on the web-site with this including key public bodies such as North Area Committee, Alnwick Steering Group, Town & Parish Councils and other public groups as well as professional organisations and other key groups.

Stage 4: Presentations were provided to those groups who requested further information with senior officers attending and presenting the proposals to the respective group. This opportunity was taken up by Alnwick Town Council, Alnwick Steering Group and The North Area Committee, in addition to this an area officer attended the Local Multi Agency Problem Solving Group.

Stage 5: Review and production of Final Report available on NCC/NFRS web-site.

Findings

This section provides the key findings from the website survey and the presentation to community groups undertaken in the research period. Firstly, it should be highlighted that the number of respondents to the web-site survey was limited to 14 people. Secondly, it may also be worth considering that the negative comments within the survey and recorded in Section B was mainly down to 1 person likely to have more deeply held views than the majority of the population.

The findings have been divided into three sections:

- **Section A** highlights the overall results of the web-site survey consultation.
- **Section B** explores the comments identified in the survey responses, and from the presentation to community groups and their responses with excerpts to the strategic proposal used to provide deeper insight into the respondents' thoughts on the re-location.
- **Section C** highlights and explores the key issues raised in both parts of the consultation that may directly relate to and explain the Authorities position.

Section A: Overall results from the web-site survey

The consultation survey provided the following quantitative data:

Question	Quantitative Result
1. Are you supportive of replacing the existing fire station with a purpose built facility at Lionheart Estate?	85.7% either strongly agreed or agreed.
2. Are you supportive of the proposal to incorporate additional services such as Community Safety?	85.7% either strongly agreed or agreed.
3. NFRS as part of NCC and the proposed creation of a new community fire station as part of co-location of council services – Do you agree with the principle of realizing efficiencies through co-location?	85.7% either strongly agreed or agreed.
4. Are you aware of the role the Fire Service performs at Alnwick?	100% either strongly agreed or agreed.
5. Do you agree that fire safety and prevention is a key role of the fire service?	100% either strongly agreed or agreed.
6. Do you agree that the fire service should be involved in youth engagement and safety work?	85.7% either strongly agreed or agreed.
7. What additional services/functions would you like to see the fire service providing?	Only 28.6% indicated a view in this question.
8. Should the new facility include space for use by the various community groups and residents of Alnwick?	35.7% indicated no to this (Remainder did not make an indication).
9. Would you make use of the community space for meeting events?	50% indicated no.
10. Optional – provision of contact details for future contact about use of fire station for community use.	21.4% provided contact details.
11. Do you have any other comments, supportive or concerns?	50% provided comments.
12. Are you happy to provide this information?	85.7% indicated yes.

The above table indicates that the majority of respondents were supportive of the proposed Community Fire Station re-location to Lionheart Industrial Estate as part of NCC 'Super Depot'.

The results also indicate that all respondents were aware of the Fire Service role and that fire safety and prevention is a key role.

There is an issue that requires further exploration in terms of use of the new Community Fire Station by Community Groups.

Section B: Key issues highlighted by the consultation

This section of the report explores issues and comments raised by respondents from the web-site survey and public group consultation events to provide qualitative information.

Presentations & Correspondence

North Area Committee

The committee supported the proposal "*.....however wanted to confirm that the move would not be a precursor to any withdrawal from other more rural areas, fire cover had to be spread across the county which was welcomed by members.*" That the proposed site "*.....was good for access to the A1 and A697, being and that development would be the right site for the right reasons. With access to RAF Boulmer being very important.*" In addition to this they commented "*.....the presentation had shown the benefits of co-location and was testament to ongoing good work to deliver this proposal. Members welcomed the good work of NFRS in organizing and domestic smoke alarms, which the public put much trust in and had a positive effect.*"

Alnwick Town Council

"I refer to the presentation to the Town Council about the proposed construction of a new £5m Fire Station on the Lionheart Industrial Estate. The Council understand the rationale for this and are supportive of the proposal, particularly in relation to community use and retention of the Young Firefighters scheme....."

Steering Group (Alnwick & Denwick)

Commented that the group supported the proposal on the evening but no correspondence has been received.

Alnwick Local Multi Agency Problem Solving Group

".....supported the proposal."

Local Press & Councilor Comments

Alnwick town and county councillor Gordon Castle said: "after a previous plan in 2009 failed, this one is more robust and much more acceptable."

"The best thing about it is that it keeps a fire station in Alnwick for the next 25 years."

"It is away from residential areas, next to other council facilities and I think it will be good for the town".

Alnwick councillor Heather Cairns added: "It will be very welcome and it sounds like an excellent plan".

Correspondence from Longhoughton Member

"I welcome the proposals and the benefits they will bring."

RAF Boulmer

"Shared services deliver numerous benefits particularly in times of economic uncertainty when pressure to reduce costs and do more with less is high."

Felton Parish

".....Felton Parish Council of the proposals for the Alnwick Fire Station to be moved to a "super depot" at Lionheart Industrial Estate and the Parish Council would like to convey their support for this proposal."

Web-Site Survey [quotes and comments copied verbatim from surveys]

Supportive

"This new fire station will not only benefit the fire and rescue service, but will benefit the other local Services using it too. There is a good area for training in the back of the yard such as an RTC area, Which i hope will be used on an open day and also the new design of the yard and the tower will be very good. I am in strong support of the construction of this new station"

"I agree with the County Council's reasons for the proposal"

"It would make more sense to build a new station in the longer term"

"When the station opens, I would like to see a large open day event going on. This also would include the Young Firefighters being involed massivley. I have seen the plans and the facilities the young firefighters are getting is amazing. I would also like the fire service to do some more events at the new station such as RTC demo's, hose and fire drills by the firefighters and young firefighters"

"My daughter attends the YFA and I would just like to say how supportive the leaders have been and what a great opportunity it has been for my daughter. I hope this continues when the fire station relocates"

"When this new station is open i would like to see more events happening there that the community can come and see. I would also like to see allot more happening with the young firefighters when this new station opens. I am a young firefighter my self and would love to be involved as much as i can. I hope this build can go ahead as soon as possible. and good luck with it"

Balanced

"I agree because it will save money within the services but there may be a few problems such as Response time due to traffic. On weekends the tip gets very busy and if there is a call it may reduce response time. It may also be harder for the appliances to get out onto calls. if there is a community safety department left after all the cuts then yes ,it goes without saying"

"The idea of providing community space is sound but not necessarily appropriate in the proposed location which is out of town and difficult to reach without a car"

Critical

"Present site is an ideal position and the best location for the responding personnel to reach the turn out times as most of them are in the directional flow of traffic. also on adverse to weather conditions it allows some crew to respond on foot, bicycle again to meet turnout times. the current site could easily be upgraded, the large and small garages easily converted into offices meeting, rooms"

"Some stations already have this facility however they remain under utilised and often bring access difficulties. The location of the proposed site doe not make it accessible to the whole community therefore it seems a paper exercise or an excuse to raise more funds to pay for the PFI build"

"How can you class it as a community station when it will be out of the town , will it be serviced by transport (bus etc) this was supposed to happen for the West Hartford site, but never happened"

"I think the new station is very badly sited. It is further away from most on call firefighters homes, which will result in slower turn outs by the appliances, particuarly in rush hours when the area around willowburn can get congested. It has only one route that the responding fire fighters can use to get to it,not a choice that they enjoy at the present site. Scenario: RTC closing the Willowtree roundabout, how will crews get to station to book on with the appliances without a huge detour via Denwick or Shilbottle? A better position would have been on the old Willis garage site, next to the present station"

Section C: Issues identified in the consultation and NFRS considerations

This section sets out the key issues raised during the consultation period 23rd October 2013 to 18th December 2013. These include information and data collected through the web-site survey and also responses collected from the presentations to key groups within the Alnwick Area.

A significant point to note is the very low response and engagement on the issue by members of the community from the web-site survey and the limited response to letters sent to key stakeholders. This indicates that the proposal would not appear to be an issue that raises concern in the community where they feel the proposed re-location is not well planned. In analyzing the low number return of the web-site survey it should be noted negative or critical comments were only from 1 or 2 of the respondents. In addition an open event held at Alnwick Fire Station on the 6th November 2013, as advertised in the Northumberland Gazette, resulted in only a few people turning up none of whom criticised the proposal.

However importantly there was more engagement from the main community groups representing people of Alnwick and the surrounding area who collectively supported the proposal and indicated that it was the correct thing for NFRS and The Authority to do. The consistent message and response by these groups as detailed above clearly identified that the proposal to re-locate the Community Fire Station as part of the County Councils wider Depot Rationalisation scheme was correct and would bring benefits to the communities of Alnwick and surrounding area. The Town Council clearly support the proposal with the statement;

"I refer to the presentation to the Town Council about the proposed construction of a new £5m Fire Station on the Lionheart Industrial Estate. The Council understand the rationale for this and are supportive of the proposal, particularly in relation to community use and retention of the Young Firefighters scheme.....".

Also a key statement from the survey clearly demonstrates views on the positive nature of the scheme and the joined up approach by NCC with provision for other local services and the creation of the new 'Super Depot';

"This new fire station will not only benefit the fire and rescue service, but will benefit the other local Services using it too. There is a good area for training in the back of the yard such as an RTC area, Which i hope will be used on an open day and also the new design of the yard and the tower will be very good. I am in strong support of the construction of this new station"

However in considering points raised during the consultation there was critique to the proposal with the following points to be considered summarised as;

1. Location of the new site being further out of the town with increased response times;
2. Under use of Community Facilities and location away from the community;
3. Location of the new Community Fire Station with only access by a single road from Alnwick.

The Authority and NFRS have considered the aforementioned points in developing the proposal as part of NCC and consider the following to be a reasonable response to the concerns raised;

1. In terms of the 'location of the new site being further out of town' and 'increasing response times', the service recognises that this may occur to some areas however the new site is also closer to other areas such as Shilbottle where response times will be reduced. In considering this point it needs to note that some of the crew responding into the station will have similar travel times to the station as they go via Willowburn Avenue rather than past the existing site.

However whilst the new Community Fire Station is going to be further away from the centre of Alnwick the Service will still meet its recognised response standards. In addition to this the national Fire Services Risk Modelling toolkit was used to assess effect on risk levels and these remained the same for the town of Alnwick and surrounding villages.

As part of any re-location similar to this the Authority undertakes a positive bespoke campaign to areas identified where risk levels vary. As an area of housing on the outskirts of Alnwick moved from below average risk to average there will be a positive community safety campaign in that area.

Therefore in assessing the issue of increased response times NFRS consider that the re-location of the station will not increase risk unduly to the communities of Alnwick and the service will meet its response standards.

2. In respect to concern over existing under use of community facilities and the new location being away from the community it is necessary to expand on this issue and explain the situation. In terms of under used facilities on community engagement the service consider that this is a key focus of prevention and protection of its communities which is widely recognised. The current site does not have appropriate or suitable facilities to deliver community safety in accordance with Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and is not fit for purpose.

In addition to this NFRS have over the last decade introduced numerous innovative schemes from youth engagement through work with the Prince's Trust and work with other parts of NCC in the well-being of Northumberland's Communities, which is evidence to demonstrate active use where appropriate facilities are available.

Many of these schemes have won local and national recognition. Therefore the service believes it has evidence to support its proactive work and use of community facilities. It should also be recognized that the key parts of the building for this have multiple uses from use by local services and all other parts of NCC and for partners. In terms of being away from the community it is not possible to have a facility in every community area in Alnwick, the service also serves the whole Alnwick area and the community aspect of the new Community Fire Station is more about services it provides rather than its exact location.

It is also worth noting that the Council's Household Waste Recycling Centre that serves the Alnwick Town and surrounding area is located directly alongside the proposed Community Fire Station and 'Super Depot' site on Lionheart Industrial Estate. Whilst this is a different type of community facility, its location has not created any access issues for residents and it has proven to be a very popular and well used facility.

Therefore in assessing the issue of under used community facilities and the location of them NFRS consider that it has a sound track record in community engagement and prevention, also the location is not absolutely key as it is more about activity rather than location. More significantly present facilities are not fit for purpose failing to meet DDA standards, the new facilities will achieve this whilst being shared with Local Services.

3. The point raised that there is risk due to a single route to the Community Fire Station which could cause delay or prevent crews from attending the station to respond in the event of a single point of failure. This is something that the service has considered with the appropriate risk assessment and review of incident data. The service assess this risk generically as with other operational sites and has contingency plans in place.

It is however reasonable to consider that this is a relatively low risk due to limits being 30mph around that area for speed. Also if there was some form of vehicle accident it would be relatively minor and traffic would still be able to move. In addition to this NFRS have reviewed statistical evidence and the likelihood of two incidents occurring at the same time is low.

Therefore in respect to the road network access to the new CFSt NFRS consider this to be low risk with contingency plans in place.

Conclusion

On the whole the consultation process has identified there is more support and benefits for the proposed re-location of Alnwick Community Fire Station to a new shared facility as part of NCC with Local Services and other Departments. The joined up work and the provision of fit for purpose facilities for NFRS with NCC creating a 'Super Depot' receives more positive support than negative comment from respondents from the consultation process.

It must be noted that there was limited response from residents of Alnwick to the consultation which indicates the public chose not to respond to the consultation and that the changes did not concern them.

Key to the consultation process is the support from the main Community Groups in Alnwick and the North Area Committee who all support and agree with the way forward. There were also positive points from the web-site survey returns with a greater percentage of respondents in support on several of the issues raised.

However it should be noted that there was also a small minority whom identified concerns which the Service have taken on board and consider it has a reasonable position in making its decision to proceed with the proposal. These concerns have been considered and addressed in the previous section during the decision making process. In essence the Service consider the re-location to meet NFRS service delivery needs and also to work in conjunction with other County Council Departments has greater benefits than causes for concern.

The consultation exercise has taken appropriate steps to engage and assess public, staff and community group opinions in making its decision and having now completed the consultation exercise and evaluated the results it is considered that the proposed scheme of re-location is in the best interests of the Communities it serves and the needs of NFRS and the Authority. It is therefore recommended that, in light of the positive outcome of the consultation exercise, the Chief Fire Officer and Executive Director of Place seek the necessary approvals to progress the development of the Community Fire Station and Super Depot at Alnwick Lionheart Industrial Estate.