



DEVON &
SOMERSET
FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE

Community Risk Management Plan Consultation

Business focus group January 2022

This report outlines the findings from the focus group with businesses

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1. Introduction

The Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) is a five-year strategic plan and is supported by a Strategic Risk Analysis and an Equality Impact Assessment.

It sets out the key challenges and patterns of incidents the Service experiences now and anticipate in the future. Specifically, it highlights the risks facing our communities and how we intend to reduce these over the life of this plan. The resources that are available to achieve their priorities are also identified. The CRMP will run from April 2022 to 2027.

Production of a CRMP is a statutory duty for each fire and rescue authority. The draft was generated by considering incident data and considering staff and community knowledge (this included nearly 1,700 survey responses).

A draft version of the CRMP was consulted on via survey between 15 November 2021 and 14 January 2022. This was supported by a series of focus groups which would ensure that the views of specific audiences are heard.

2. Methodology

Third party Devon Communities Together was commissioned to deliver focus groups with certain specific audiences (people age 75+, ethnic minorities, limited mobility, rented accommodation, additional sensory needs, living alone). The Consultation and Engagement team considered businesses.

Due to the continuing Covid-19 pandemic and geographical area the Service covers, the session was hosted online. The same structure was used for each focus group, designed to explore the risks and mitigation strategies most relevant to the specific audience.

A section explicitly discussing the accessibility and understanding of the service provision was included.

The session plan included:

- opening introductions (including names and location)
- short presentation on context of the Service and the CRMP from the fire service
- each individual raised one or two risks/hazards most prevalent in their minds and the minds of their community, and reasons for this prevalence
- via input from the fire service the group discussed the mitigation actions named in the CRMP related to risks raised by the group. The group discussed both strengths and potential improvements for these mitigations
- a closing conversation on the barriers around the accessibility of the service and how to communicate key messages most effectively with that workshop's community group.

The above was a broad structure for conversation, but of course conversations criss-crossed between these areas and followed the interests of the group.

Due to the availability of businesses and business representatives, some were individual phone calls as well as a joint Teams meeting.

3. Participants:

Participants were recruited through business networks and multiple individual businesses were contacted.

Business networks sent requests to their membership base to join the conversation.

Federation of Small Businesses (FSB)
Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce
Better Business for All
World of Country Life (Devon tourist attraction)

Barrier to recruitment: Businesses fed back that a barrier to attendance was that they were too busy, so the focus was on business network group leaders.

Devon's Top Attractions are keen to work with the Service and made introductions with several tourism businesses, one of whom was able to spare the time, despite being low-season and a 'good time' according to Devon's Top Attractions.

4. Findings

- No new risks were raised by businesses, although consideration of changes in occupancy of large retail parks or office buildings was raised. The diverse nature of visitors to businesses was raised and all staff being aware of their needs including language and mobility.

"The world is changing and businesses are working more hybrid and premises will be less occupied that they were. More people will be working from home and that then puts a legal responsibility on the employer. People have to be given the right chair and desk but not sure how we stand on fire safety?"

"We can have lots of people on site from babies to grandparents."

- Businesses are generally not engaged with the fire service. Raised not as a negative, as businesses would be more engaged with the fire service were there an issue. It was felt that businesses did not generally know what the fire service does within the protection team.

"Fire isn't the greatest consideration for businesses. We have to be compliant, and health and safety is very important and all that sort of thing. But businesses are fighting a number of fronts at the moment, including Brexit and Covid, inflation, lack of skills, lack of resource and having no resource at all."

"We have fire training, weekly checks...we just get on with it."

- There were no mitigations raised that were not included in the CRMP. Good customer service and communication was mentioned by all participants, especially if there has been or is an incident locally.
 - Keeping businesses updated during an incident and understanding when they can get back to their business is important for their planning. Examples given included when what is thought of as a 'fender bender' closes the road for

longer than expected or when flooding occurs businesses being able to gain access so they can work from home.

- A suggestion for a certificate or sticker to display as an incentive for compliance was suggested, similar to food hygiene.

“If they can’t access (their business), their whole livelihood has gone for the amount of time the premises is closed.”

- Working more in partnership was raised and offers to attend meetings across the region were made by all representatives. In addition, thoughts on how the Service could work more closely with Trading Standards, food hygiene and councils to signpost businesses to the right information.

“Have a speaker from the Service at webinars that are taking place in the Mendip area that are aimed at business owners. These meetings are already supported by environmental health officers, local education providers and trading standards that cover a number of different areas across Devon and Somerset.”

- Recognised that participants are all part of a wider network with access to information. Businesses who do not have a membership to FSB, Better Business for All or a Chamber of Commerce, or tourism network (Devon’s Top Attractions) may have less access to information and less awareness. Some more at risk businesses, such as those with living accommodation above, will not be members.
- There was some discussion around local risks, such as wood burners in traditional rural country pubs, and access to the tourist attraction when it can only be accessed by one lane.