



Community Compass Advisory Group

Summary Minutes: 2nd September 2029

Online via MS Teams



Attendees Redacted

Chair: KD

CW	TA
LAL	SR
NG	RS
TCG	JM
GG	

DN ESFRS	AM ESFRS
HY ESFRS	NB ESFRS
DJ ESFRS	

Apologies

CS	JD
MA	VS
SD	

Welcome & Introductions.

KD led round table introductions and welcomed all advisors to the meeting

Actions from previous meeting

DJ updated on the following actions

Action 05 DJ circulate Chair email post meeting and invite advisors to attend a closed pre-meet session of CCAG for advisors only. To date, no uptake has been made to this offer, and the action has been closed.

Action 09 DJ forward report link to advisors on publication in June. This was completed with last minutes – DJ to resend for new advisors

Action 10 DJ to create substantive agenda item CRMP review proposals years 1&2

CRMP created as substantive agenda item for September meeting

Community Risk Management Plan 2025-2030

DN explained that the CRMP, part of the Fire and Rescue National Framework, is entering consultation with East Sussex Fire Authority. It identifies risks like fires, collisions, and environmental threats, and outlines actions to reduce them through safety initiatives and emergency response. The plan is shaped by evolving factors—demographic, political, environmental, technological, and global—and developed using local/national data, expert input, and partner insights. Risks are assessed holistically, with continuous review and equality checks. Public and stakeholder engagement, including pre-engagement, helps shape priorities.

DN provided a comprehensive overview of the first 2 years of the CRMP – in relation to protection, prevention and Response (see attached presentation) highlighting the areas of activity the service would engage with, how these activities would affect the local community and methodology to audit those activities to better understand where ESFRS has made a difference. DN noted that exact planning beyond 3 years was more challenging due to future budget uncertainties and forthcoming regional devolution.

DN confirmed that there would be a comprehensive consultation process beginning on 5th September to 31st October. Consultation will be supported by Opinion Research Services via an online survey, with paper copies available on request. To support the consultation process and encourage public engagement, there would be an awareness campaign – this would include the Community Compass Advisory Group and promotion through social media, traditional media, posters, and other channels. Promotional efforts may be adjusted, such as mailing surveys to targeted addresses.

Advisor's comments:

Advisors thanked DN for their overview and asked how the CRMP would align with funding pressures – specifically cuts that were being described in the news. DN responded that the service had in place a medium-term financial management plan which runs alongside the CRMP, at present the plan is within the allocated budget as laid out for the next two years and would need to be subject to ongoing review. Current predictions suggest a budgetary shortfall of £1.6m in the next cycle which will be addressed through further efficiency savings and use of reserves.

Advisors asked about what specialist and strategic assets were available for ESFRS to support other fire services and statutory services. DN provided an overview of equipment and specialist crews employed by ESFRS who were available as part of a national mutual assistance programme to assist with emergency response in other parts of the country – these included high volume pumps for example to fight forest fires or widespread flooding.

In response to supporting local emergency services HY explained that although the fire service would always help when possible- especially if requested as a Category 1 incident, ESFRS were not mandated to do so, This type of support was not covered by funding and there would always be limitations on the level of medical support and clinical training fire crews had in relation to ambulance crews. HY note that, nationally, there are many varieties of models that fire services employed ..., ESFRS worked collaboratively with Seacam when attending joint incidents.

HY described several other areas of business where ESFRS offered community support, such as fire safety visits in hotels housing refugees including interpretive services, HY referenced the meeting in May where David Kemp ESFRS prevention manager outlined extensive community offering which the service provided (minutes available on ESFRS CCAG webpage)

Wholetime Recruitment Programme

NB updated on initial results and outcomes of ESFRS recent Wholetime Recruitment programme that took place between 9th March-21st July. They provided a summary of the process and its respective stages including initial advertising, have a go day, physical & written tests and finally the interview stage. NB noted how workforce data demands (up to 35 upcoming leavers due to retirement and natural attrition) had necessitated a much shorter campaign than would usually be the norm. The Service determined that there was a requirement to fill 16 whole time vacancies immediately and that we would look to create a pipeline pool of a further 80-90 candidates for future training courses over the next 2yrs with a time to hire of 5 months. ESFRS received 527 applications for the role.

NB shared several data slides outlining demographic outcomes for the recruitment process – focussing on protected characteristics of Sex/gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Insights from the initial analysis revealed a mixed picture. (see attached presentation for details) which advisors were keen to explore.

Advisor's comments:

Advisors noted that the data demonstrated a disproportionately high number of females, people from ethnically diverse backgrounds and people from LGBTQ+ backgrounds being rejected from the process at all stages, but the greatest disproportionality was in relation to the 'sift' stage. The sift stage included an online psychometric test provided by Arctic Shore.

The fail rates were 46% for women compared with 33% men, 40-50% for non-white ethnicities compared with 34% white British, 53% LGBTQ+ compared with 34% heterosexual and 50% declared disability compared with 32% non-disabled respectively.

Advisors asked what protocols were in place during the recruitment process to ensure personal bias could not influence decision making when promoting candidates through successive stages of the process. NB assured advisors that all stages of the process were 'blind' to demographic data, which was only revealed at the very end of the process. Many of the tests, such as the physical testing were binary in their outcomes i.e. pass or fail.

Advisors suggested the cause for this disproportionality may be due to the algorithm employed by the online test; they noted that tests of this nature were likely to include an inherent bias weighted towards the demographic of the designers, which could disproportionately favour one demographic over another. Advisors requested they be given the opportunity to review the online assessment- themselves, they felt this would be a useful exercise to compare their own scores with that of the benchmark.

Action: NB to send Arctic shores link and invite advisors to complete the online assessment – including a redacted version of the candidates scores and arrange a follow up meeting with advisors to explore findings.

Advisors noted the numbers of applicants from ethnically diverse backgrounds was very low – which could hinder ESFRS's aspiration to be as representative a service as possible. NB acknowledged that achieving higher application rates from ethnically diverse communities would always be challenging considering the overall ethnic demographic of East Sussex. NB noted that most applicants from ethnically diverse backgrounds who failed the process did so at the maths and English stage, which had a 60% pass mark.

Advisors asked how the maths and English test compared against a national GCSE pass requirement and did ESFRS tests provide an equivalent pass grade of 4? They also asked how old the in-house tests were, noting that post 2012 the GCSE national standard was increased– if ESFRS were still using pre 2012 benchmarking then current applicants who took GCSES pre 2012 may be disadvantaged as they were unlikely to have been taught at the 'higher' grade standard. HY agreed with advisors that this is something ESFRS should explore further.

Action: NB/AM – work with HR to explore maths and English tests – how the 60% pass mark compares with current GCSE standards – and current minimum pass grade of 4

Advisors asked if pass rates could be reduced for some demographics to make passing easier, or whether there were programmes such as access courses, or apprentices via local colleges which the service could introduce to better prepare applicants for a career in the fire service. HY stated that there were minimum national standards for maths and English as the firefighter role was highly technical.

HY stated that methods such as access courses or apprenticeships had been tried before – but were often hampered by funding obligations, they also stated that there is a review currently taking place at the national fire service level to agree a standard, which hopefully would allow future embedding of more structured pathways such as BTEC's into the fire service.

Action HY/NB To give the CCAG assurance, considering comments made advisors and insights gained, **HY stated that ESFRS would be withdrawing Arctic Shores as a tool for recruitment and online assessment tool. Updates will be provided to CCAG regarding suitable alternative post review.**

Advisors noted that application rates for LGBTQ+ people were disproportionately low compared to East Sussex and Brighton & Hove population, which warranted further exploration, they asked why those candidates were failing disproportionately at the sift and assessment stages. Advisors also noted the numbers who did not disclose their sexual orientation had a slightly higher success rate than those who identified as LGBTQ+. NB agreed that further analysis was required but reiterated that none of the demographic data of applicants was revealed to any of the assessors or interviewers at any point in the recruitment process. Advisors agreed that direct bias was unlikely but felt the whole process should be viewed much more through an overall inclusion lens, RS offered to support ESFRS explore this in greater detail going forwards

NB stated that that there were also several good news aspects of the recruitment process. Compared with the previous campaign (2023). The current campaign received higher numbers /proportions of applicants from female, ethnically diverse and LGBTQ+ communities despite only running for a much shorter time, receiving 527 total applicants compared with 1100 in 2023. The current campaign also included a higher number of successful candidates from those backgrounds than the previous one. In 2023 out of 24 successful candidates – only one was female, and all were white British. In 2025, there were 16 successful candidates,

- 4 appointed female candidates with a further 14 in the talent pool for future courses
- 3 ethnically diverse appointed candidates with a further 5 in the talent pool for future courses

Action NB to invite advisors to recruitment outcomes review session to improve understanding and explore mitigations around aspects of disproportionality in the recruitment process

Service Overview

- **HMICFRS:** HY provided an update on the final report of ESFRS's most recent inspection by HMICFRS, that took place in January and was published in June. The overall picture was one of gradual but steady improvement in all areas, including within the space of service culture which had improved from requires improvement to 'adequate'. ESFRS aspiration was to be good in all areas where we are measured, acknowledging that funding issues would always be the challenge in criteria where the service aspired to achieve a mark of outstanding.

Action DJ reshare report link for the benefit of those new to the group

Pride events: HY Described ESFRS's participation and support of East Sussex's three main Pride events during the summer – Eastbourne, Hastings and Brighton. All events were a great success. At Brighton the service had its highest ever attendance of staff – with over 60 taking part, including many who came from other national services, who were in the region because of attendance at the National Fire Pride staff network conference which ESFRS co-hosted. As a vital part of our ongoing community engagement offering, ESFRS is proud of our continued participation in Pride and has no plans to change this policy.

Next meeting Tuesday 16th December 1400-1600 MS Teams