



Safer Together Have Your Say

Feedback Summary

July 2019

Overview

The Safer Together Survey was designed to seek the opinions of SWFRS staff and stakeholders with regards to what we can do to improve our service over the next year, and ask them what key changes we should look to make, including areas we should focus less attention on. It was mostly an internal consultation. Responses were designed to be open-ended and allow respondents the opportunity to raise themes / issues in a confidential environment.

We received 132 responses. The current genders, age groups, ethnicities, and home locations of our staff were well represented by those who responded.

Key Themes

These are the umbrella themes that garnered the most comment:

- Knowledge & Expertise – our skillsets, sharing and learning together, promoting best practice
- Wellbeing & Support – listening, understanding one another, and training
- Performance, Flexibility & Agility – highly productive quality output, anywhere, at all times
- Environmentally Friendly – take measurable steps to show that we are environmentally conscientious
- Transparency, Trust & Integrity – in our leaders and decision makers, processes and people
- Community Engagement – focus on young people, those who are most vulnerable and minority groups

This is what respondents had to say...

The people we serve and the people we employ require trust and expertise from us

Trust and expertise are broad themes that are important to both external and internal audiences. Externally, the people we serve need to trust us to keep them safe and perform our operational duties with the highest levels of expertise. Internally, the people we work alongside need to trust that their colleagues have the skills and knowledge necessary to perform their duties to a high standard, and be accountable when those standards slip.

More active listening, support and internal engagement will improve staff wellbeing and morale

There is a feeling that staff are not always being actively listened to by their managers, and that some opinions are not being valued. It is unclear whether this means that some staff do not see any tangible outcomes from discussions they have had with line managers, or whether they have not been informed appropriately of the outcomes of these conversations.



Employ the right staff, give them the tools they need to succeed, then trust them to perform their job to the highest standards

Invest in people and support them with the tools and emotional support necessary to carry out their duties to a high quality. Performance standards across the service should always be set at the highest level and those in executive and managerial positions should set the standards for all employees. All employees should be accountable for the work they do, and given the appropriate hardware, software, information, knowledge, training and support for them to be a success in their roles.

Happier employees are more productive and receiving recognition for good work should be a standard element of the communication between line managers and their staff. All staff, at all levels, should be valued by their colleagues.

People would like to be better informed about the roles and responsibilities of their co-workers. There is a feeling in some quarters that both internal staff engagement and knowledge sharing is inadequate, that there is too much working in silos and not enough transparency. We should ensure that all departments understand the challenges faced by the organization and understand the strategic direction and priorities for each department.

Staff want to see that they are all treated fairly and equally. They want their line managers to understand individual's needs, and have the ability to demonstrate empathy and compassion where needed. They want to be appraised against the same standards as all of their colleagues.

There is a feeling that some operational staff are being micromanaged, which is impairing their ability to do their job as effectively as possible.

The success of the Staff Engagement Network will depend on its ability to show staff that their opinions are taken on board and responded to.

Staff are keen to have more Learning & Development (L&D) opportunities, and be supported with accessible training on systems, processes and equipment

Operational and support staff are keen to be given more L&D opportunities to enable them to grow, become better in their roles and be provided a clear pathway for personal and professional development.

Focused training is a recurring theme. Operational staff want to be trained to a high level against the major incident/risk types in their station areas. They do not want any obstacles preventing them attending a training event that would be beneficial to them performing their roles as best as possible. Some obstacles cited are duties that certain respondents deem as being less important than training, such as community engagement. Operational staff also want managerial training, including people management training. Some see benefits in extending their role to undertake medical emergency response duties, whilst others wish to focus on what they see as being their traditional core duties. All want to carry out tasks that help lower risk, prevent harm and keep people safe.

Staff want the opportunity to collaborate and share skills and knowledge within the service and wider afield.

Our ICT should help, not hinder productivity and we should embrace new technology

Our ICT system should reflect the best in practice reputation of our front-line services. Staff want to be able to use easy to learn, intuitive systems and IT processes. The current IT infrastructure is said to suffer from glitches that reduce productivity.



Operational crews want us to supply them with the most up to date, fit for purpose, innovative equipment and with the associated training necessary. One specific example of this would be investment in new personal radios because the current model is referenced by one respondent as not being fit for purpose and is therefore hampering performance at operational incidents.

There is a desire for us to work smarter, by using new technology, having the ability to work in a more agile and flexible way that will enable us to better share information, skills and knowledge between us. The ability to sometimes work remotely away from HQ or Station grounds will help create a happier, more productive workforce.

We should be seen as actively taking steps to become even more environmentally friendly

Areas respondents highlighted included the reduction of non-essential paper printing, the elimination of single use plastics and the introduction of electric pool vehicles. We should communicate to staff that we taking measurable steps in each of these three areas. The promotion of recycling around the service should also be a focus of ours.

Transparency is a necessity in our internal promotion process

There is a lack of trust in the current operational promotional process. Some staff believe that changes to the process should be considered, with the feeling that it is not always the best candidate who achieves promotion. The process is said to allow variables other than empirically measured performance standards and skill set to play a part in decision making. One variable cited in the feedback was input/coaching given to candidates by some line managers but not by others. More support to help candidates through the process would be welcomed. Another critique was that the end-to-end promotional process was too long and overly complicated. The suitability of existing performance assessments has been questioned because some feel that they do not adequately take into account different individual learning styles.

Make RDS roles more enticing and create an improved RDS to WDS pathway

Retaining RDS staff as part of the operational workforce is important. Feedback suggests that we could have a better, simpler route for highly competent RDS staff to become WDS staff, promoting people with existing skills, experience and understanding of the WDS role. Suggestions for an improved pathway included the use of temporary promotions. There are requests for the pay gap between RDS and WDS to become smaller, by increasing RDS pay.

Review shift patters and flexible rostering for operational staff

Operational staff are calling for us to find a solution to what are perceived to be problems with flexible rostering. The inability for people to take their Public Holidays allowance is a recurring theme. Associated with this is mention of operational staff wishing to be allowed more flexibility to spend time with their families at the same time their family members are also off work/school. Issues with shift patters is cited as a trigger for staff talking sickness leave and crews riding four per appliance becoming a regular occurrence. Staff do not want to any shortfall in service cover, they want to have the ability to help their colleagues by managing flexible rostering between them. There are specific examples provided for how the system could be changed. One such example is to work closely with unions to use rostering to grant Public Holidays with no strikes for refusals, which would allow more Public Holidays to be granted. Pre-arranged overtime could be used to cover short notice staffing issues such as sickness absence, and it could also be used as an alternative to the strategic reserve to cover shortfalls in covering by OCDs, with the caveat that overtime would only be granted if an employee has recently performed a roster shift.



The core roles and responsibilities of a firefighter are being debated

What respondents define to be 'core' duties is not clearly stated, but many feel that the service has moved away from what they perceive it should be concentrating on, which includes:

- More operational training and less time spent on other projects, initiatives and community engagement activities.
- Less attention paid to creating social media content in general, and specifically the amount of attention paid to wildfires. There is a desire for us to have a more connected, strategic approach to the content we publish.
- A feeling that the culture of the service is more 'corporate' in nature, which has a diluting effect on the image of a firefighter and in turn the pride our operational staff have in the job they perform. Some want to see less micromangement, less bureaucracy and not so much focus on performance measures and meeting targets.

Engagement should have a three pronged focus

- Our workforce should mirror the communities we serve and we should be a workplace that embraces inclusivity

The communities we serve should feel like they are all represented in the diversity of our workforce. There are calls for a drive to recruit the best candidates across the broad spectrum of groups, ethnicities and genders we have in our region. We should also take more active steps for staff to feel that the service embraces inclusivity and is a safe place for all employees to be open and express themselves. Hand in hand with this, we have been asked to do more engagement with demographics who are currently underrepresented in our workforce, and more engagement with minority population communities in general. We need to involve under-represented groups before making decisions that affect them.

- The vulnerable elderly are at most risk and require our immediate focus

Responses suggested that we could be doing more to address those in society who are most at risk, citing the vulnerable elderly as a clear focus. One suggestion was that we could be better at communicating the advisory services we offer and communicating which free services we offer to households, particularly those with elderly occupants.

- Connecting with younger people will reap rewards now and in the future

Our current engagement work with children and young people was praised and staff believe that we should continue to drive this forward in areas of awareness and prevention. Educating younger people will distribute key messages through families and the wider community. Influencing the behavior of future generations is identified as a critical element in reducing risk and reducing deliberate/malicious incident rates in the coming years. Catalysts of, and risk from, refuse and grass fires were cited as one example where youth education now will have a beneficial impact on behaviors in the future.

Risk reduction was not a major theme in the consolation feedback

Despite this, some staff did call for us to build on our targeted risk reduction activities by more information sharing between partner agencies. Operational staff want to be fully briefed on the risk profile of the areas they cover.