



AGENDA ITEM: 9

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

21st November 2011

Draft response to the Welsh Government consultation on changing the publication date of Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) annual Improvement Plans

Report by Dawn Docx, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To summarise for Members the contents of a consultation document issued by the Welsh Government relating to changing the publication date of FRA improvement plans; and to propose a response for submission by the 28 November 2011 deadline.

Background

- 2 For several years the Authority has published its Corporate Plans at specific points in the planning year according to whichever regulations were in force at the time.

Best Value Performance Plans/Improvement Plans

- 3 Between 1999 and 2001 the deadline for publishing Best Value Performance Plans was set at the end of March – i.e. one day before the start of the financial year to which the plans related.
- 4 New requirements between 2002 and 2005 moved the publication deadline forward to the end of June – i.e. a quarter of the way through the financial year to which the plans related.
- 5 Further change meant that between 2006 and 2009 FRAs published their plans even later, by the end of October – i.e. over half way through the financial year to which the plans related.

- 6 Since their introduction in 2004, however, Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs) and Risk Reduction Plans (RRPs) have always been published ahead of the period to which they related.
- 7 Rather than run two separate processes for improvement planning and risk reduction planning, FRAs in Wales have been encouraged by the Welsh Government to adopt a single planning process that combines both elements.
- 8 Although by 2008 the publication deadline for both plans had been unified at 31 October, the Improvement Plan continued to be for the current year and the RRP continued to be for the forthcoming period.
- 9 The Local Government Measure 2009 [Section 15(7)] requires the publication of Improvement Plans as soon as reasonably practicable either:
 - a) after the start of the financial year to which the plan relates; or
 - b) after any other date set by Welsh Ministers by Order.
- 10 The introduction of the FRA (Improvement Plans) Wales Order 2010 meant that for the first time FRAs were able to publish both their Improvement and their Risk Reduction Plans together by the end of October for the next financial year.

Introduction

- 11 The current arrangements of an October deadline mean that Improvement/Risk Reduction Plans are published for the forthcoming financial year before the Authority has completed its financial planning for that year. Potentially, therefore, Improvement/Risk Reduction Plans could be either over-ambitious or could miss opportunities to contain more.
- 12 Earlier this year WAG officials sought to move the publication date for combined plans forward to March, with a view to moving the date of the 2012-13 plans forward to March 2012. However, the Authority was informed in March that the necessary consent to make the changes had not been secured, and that consequently the 2012-13 plans had to be published by October 2011.

- 13 This consultation, therefore, is on a proposal to introduce the change of publication date with effect from the 2013-14 Plan, which would be published as soon as practicable after 31 December 2012 instead of by 31 October 2012.
- 14 The consultation also indicates the Welsh Government's intention to review the Local Government Measure 2009 guidance that it issued for FRAs in May 2010, and to undertake a further consultation later this year to seek views on that revised guidance.

Information

- 15 The draft response in Appendix 1:
 - a) supports the intended change of improvement plan publication date;
 - b) emphasises the consequential need to review the issued guidance documents soon.

Recommendation

- 16 That Members agree the response as drafted (see Appendix 1) for submission before the 28 November 2011 deadline.

Draft response to WAG Consultation WG13412 Fire and Rescue Authorities – Publication of Improvement Plans

Question 1: Do you agree with the proposed change to the requirement for the publication of FRA Improvement Plans to as soon as practicable after 31 December of the year prior to the financial year to which the plan relates?

North Wales FRA would welcome the replacement of the restrictive 31 October deadline for publishing the following year's Improvement Plan with the increased flexibility of publishing as soon as reasonably practicable after 31 December.

We have asked one question in relation to the proposed Order. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

North Wales FRA supports the intention to merge elements of risk reduction planning and wider improvement planning in a single revision to the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 Part 1 Guidance that was issued to FRAs in May 2010.

We would therefore like to emphasise the importance of issuing this revised guidance in good time to allow FRAs to make adjustments where necessary to ensure compliance. We look forward to being able to contribute to the compilation of this revision, and to responding to the planned consultation well ahead of the start of the next financial year.