

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT

DATE:	19 th July 2004
REPORT BY:	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To provide Members with information regarding the findings of the public opinion survey conducted between October 2003 and January 2004.

1. **INFORMATION**

1.1 Background

In accordance with statutory guidance relating to Best Value Performance Indicator (BVPI) 3, a randomly-sampled public opinion survey was conducted last winter to gauge the percentage of people in the authority's area who are very satisfied or fairly satisfied with 'the way the Authority runs things' (prescribed wording).

Apart from the set questions on satisfaction with the Authority and the respondent's personal profile, the survey included supplementary questions relating to a range of issues that affect the service.

In total, twenty-five fire and rescue authorities chose to commission the same external company to send out the survey questionnaires and reminder letters on their behalf, and to produce an anonymised report on the findings. For the purposes of reporting, results were statistically weighted in accordance with guidance from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

This survey is required to be repeated every three years, the only previous one having been undertaken in the year 2000.

1.2 Distribution

4,000 questionnaires were mailed to randomly selected addresses in North Wales, which generated 1,385 responses. Not all respondents had answered every question.

1.3 Results

Appendix 1 gives a summary of the results, comparing, where relevant, this survey's results with those from the year 2000.

1. **INFORMATION** *(continued)*

1.4 Main Findings *(continued)*

1.4.1 Public Satisfaction

Public satisfaction with the way the authority runs things remains relatively high.

People in the older age group (75 years and over) and those whose preferred language is Welsh tended to give more positive responses, notably in relation to their satisfaction with the service and to seeking a diverse workforce that employs more women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

1.4.2 Protection Measures in the Home

90% of respondents have smoke detectors/alarms in their home (although not necessarily on every level of the home) compared to 86% in the same survey three years ago. 30% have fire extinguishers, compared with 13% in the year 2000. However, despite campaigns to encourage people to plan their escape route from their home in the event of fire, the percentage who had, in fact, done so had fallen by 9% over the past three years.

1.4.3 Charging For Services

Whereas almost everyone (97%) thought it would be acceptable to charge for persistent calls to false alarms, and two-thirds thought it would be acceptable to charge for rescuing trapped animals, this dropped to just under half in relation to rescuing people from dangerous places or attending chemical incidents, and only a minority (17%) would want a charge to be made for attending road accidents.

1.4.4 A Career in the Service

The perception that the fire and rescue service would provide a good career is very clear, although only a small percentage of respondents had actually considered that they would want to join the service themselves. The percentage of women who had seriously considered it as a career for themselves had doubled since the last survey three years ago.

The majority of people (about 60%) think it is important to employ women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds as firefighters.

1.4.5 Bilingual Policy

An overwhelming majority (96%) of people have a positive view of our bilingual policy, and are confident that they can interact with us in their chosen language.

1. **INFORMATION** *(continued)*

1.4 Main Findings *(continued)*

1.4.6 Information and Advice from the Service

A similarly clear majority (97%) of people would prefer to receive home fire safety information from the fire service than from elsewhere.

Generally, people are aware that they can get fire safety advice from the Service, although less so in the case of older people and those from ethnic minorities.

In general, people thought it would be quite easy to access information from the Service, including those people who have a limiting disability and those who might specify a choice of English or Welsh language.

Most people wanted to continue to contact us for information via telephone or letter, with very few wanting to use e-mail, fax or touch screen information point. About a third wanted to be able to get information by personal visit to a fire station, and just over a quarter wanted to access information via the website.

1.4.7 Maximum Response Times

In relation to maximum response times, people - perhaps unsurprisingly - tend to expect quicker response times for urban areas than for rural areas.

2. **RECOMMENDATION**

2.1 That Members note the observations made and the main findings from the public satisfaction survey 2003/04.

■ **“Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way the Authority runs things?”**

In the 2000 survey, 74% had stated they were generally satisfied, and 25% stated they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

By 2003, the percentage who stated they were generally satisfied had risen to 77%, with 19% stating that they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. (The figure before statistical weighting is nearer 80%.)

At 91%, those aged over 75 gave the highest rate of positive answers, whereas only 68% of those aged 30-44 years were as positive.

The percentage of satisfied people whose preferred language is Welsh was higher than those whose preferred language is English – 88% as against 76%.

People describing themselves as white were generally more satisfied than those describing themselves as non-white (78% as opposed to 43%). White people were less likely to say they were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (19% as opposed to 57% of non-whites).

■ **Smoke Detectors/Alarms**

Overall, 90% of respondents had some smoke detectors/alarms in their homes, compared to 86% in the survey three years ago.

55% had checked their smoke alarms within the last month. Of the 2% of people who had never checked their alarm, a quarter described themselves as 'unemployed'.

■ **Planned Escape Routes**

Overall, 65% of respondents had a planned escape route from their home in the event of fire, compared to 74% in the survey three years ago. 64% of the people who described themselves as 'unemployed' had not planned their escape.

■ **Other measures**

30% of people have fire extinguishers, only 15% have fire blankets, compared with 13% and 26% three years ago.

■ **Charging for non-fire related services**

97% of respondents thought it would be reasonable to charge for persistent calls to false alarms from the same address.

61% would be prepared to pay for rescuing trapped animals, but only 47% thought it reasonable to charge for rescuing people from dangerous places.

45% thought it would be reasonable to charge for attending chemical incidents, but only 17% thought it was reasonable to do so for attending road accidents.

■ **Image of the Service**

76% of people said they would recommend a career in the fire service, although only 15% said that they had at some time considered it as a possible career for themselves. It was noticeable that the percentage of women who had considered it had doubled since the last survey, to 10%. Perhaps even more significantly, a far higher percentage of people whose preferred language is Welsh had considered joining than those whose preferred language is English – 38% compared with 11%, and 85% would recommend it as a career compared with 74%.

■ **Equality and the Workforce - Gender**

60% of people in general think it is important to recruit women as firefighters (62% in the last survey), or, put another way, 61% of women and 57% of men. Whilst the percentage of women holding this opinion had fallen by 9% over the past three years, the percentage of men who thought this had, in fact, risen by 2% in the same period. Interestingly, in the age range group, whilst 67% of those aged over 75 thought this was important, only 57% of 18-24 year olds thought so. The most noticeable difference here, however, is that whereas 78% of people whose preferred language is Welsh think this is important, only 57% of those whose preferred language is English are of the same opinion.

■ **Equality and the Workforce - Ethnicity**

We saw similar figures for matters relating to ethnicity. 59% of people think it is important to recruit people from minority ethnic groups as firefighters, with 64% of women and 52% of men thinking this. The percentage of people describing themselves as non-white and the percentage of people describing themselves as white who thought this was important was exactly the same – 59%. However, once again a higher percentage of the older age group (75+ years) think it is important than in the younger age group (18-24 years) – 68% as opposed to 60%. And, again echoing the findings of the questions relating to gender, 68% of those whose preferred language is Welsh, and 57% of those whose preferred language is English felt it was important to recruit people from minority groups.

■ **Bilingually Welsh and English**

Our bilingual policy commits to treating both languages equally, and the vast majority (96%) consider our bilingual image to be very or fairly good.

85% of the people who responded to a question about their own language preference said they prefer to speak English.

Of the respondents whose preferred language was English, 96% thought our bilingual image was very or fairly good, and 92% of the respondents whose preferred language was Welsh said the same.

96% of respondents were confident that when contacting the Service, they would be offered information in their preferred language, and 95% were confident that they would be offered the option of speaking or corresponding in their preferred language with the relevant person.

■ **Preferred supplier of home fire safety information**

An overwhelming 97% preferred to receive home fire safety information from the fire service than from a commercial company (12%), insurance company (9%), friend (3%), local voluntary organisation (12%) or council department (15%).

■ **Availability of fire safety advice**

66% of people are aware that the service provides fire safety advice, an increase of 10% since the year 2000. However, only 50% of people over 75 years of age are aware that advice is available, compared to 87% of 18-24 year olds.

Similarly, half as many people (34%) of non-white origin are aware of the availability of advice, as compared to people of white origin (67%).

■ **Other services available from the Fire and Rescue Service**

A very high percentage of people are aware that we provide a range of non-fire emergency services. 94% of people know that we undertake road accident and flood rescue, 91% know we rescue trapped animals, and 90% know we have a role in controlling chemical accidents. However, 24% of people do not realise that we undertake other types of rescue.

■ **Accessibility of information and advice**

Relatively few people know that information is available on performance (19%), key decisions (15%) and the cost of the service (27%), but a higher percentage (52%) know they can get advice on inspection of commercial and business premises. However, only 16% had sought this information in the previous 12 months.

Nevertheless, of the people who had not sought this information, 87% were quite content that it would be very or fairly accessible. 91% of people with a disability that limits their activity gave positive answers. 85% of people whose preferred language is Welsh thought access to information was good, and 88% of people whose preferred language is English thought the same.

Perhaps significantly, the 'not satisfied' group were similarly the largest sub-group who thought information was 'not very' accessible.

Few people wanted to receive information via e-mail (7%), fax (1%) or touch screen information point (8%). Favourites were telephone (45%), mail/letter (41%), and visit to a Fire Station (31%). 26% of people favoured accessing information via the website.

■ **Expected Response Times**

In relation to maximum response times, the survey showed that people generally tend to expect quicker response times to urban than rural areas. Whereas 37% of people think that 5-9 minutes should be the maximum response time to an urban area, only 11% expected this in rural areas. Conversely, whereas 28% of people thought 15-19 minutes would be reasonable in rural areas, only 12% expected this in urban areas.

All results have been statistically weighted according to ODPM guidelines.