

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	17 July 2023
Lead Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Anthony Jones – Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation
Subject	Emergency Cover Review



PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide Members with an update on the progress of the Emergency Cover Review since the last progress report which was presented to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) on 17 April 2023.
2. To confirm with Members the process and timescales for the Authority's public consultation on the future of emergency cover for the communities of North Wales.
3. To seek confirmation from the Authority of the options to be included within the public consultation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

4. Following the commissioning of an Emergency Cover Review by the Authority in September 2021, extensive work has been undertaken and the findings presented to the Member led Emergency Cover Working Group. This has met on five occasions between March 2023 and June 2023. The focus of the group has been to consider options around a future service delivery model to address existing availability challenges and to be able to respond to future operational risks.
5. This report confirms the action taken to ensure compliance with the principles of public sector consultation and provides an overview of the pre-consultation already undertaken.
6. This report seeks a decision on the options to take to full public consultation.

RECOMMENDATION

7. It is requested that Members either:
 - i) Endorse the recommendation to commence a public consultation around options 1 and 2; or
 - ii) Alternatively, agree to commence a public consultation around options of 1, 2 and 3

INFORMATION

8. The Audit Wales review of Corporate Resilience in North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority was published in April 2021. It recommended that the Authority should review station locations to identify opportunities to optimise emergency response arrangements.
9. In addition, the Chief Fire Officer's (CFO) situational assessment presented to Authority Members on 20 September 2021 highlighted a number of key risks facing the Authority. These included the challenges of maintaining sufficient day time availability of on call firefighters working on the 36 retained duty system (RDS) stations in North Wales
10. In response, the Authority agreed to initiate a programme of reviews including an Emergency Cover Review (ECR). The key objective of the ECR was to consider the current arrangements and to recommend options to provide a fair, sustainable and equitable emergency response across the whole of North Wales, balancing demand and current and future community risks.
11. This work has been overseen by a Member led Emergency Cover Review Working Group. Membership comprised of six Members, one from each constituent local authority.
12. An independent company, ORH, was commissioned to work with the Emergency Cover Review team. ORH are industry experts and provide data analytics to a range of organisations working in the emergency sector. They have provided technical support in relation to data analysis and modelling to critique current emergency cover arrangements and to identify the optimum locations of any additional day staffed stations.
13. There have been five meetings of the working group to review potential options for improvements; 14 March, 4 April, 2 May, 5 June and 22 June 2023. All the Members of the Authority were invited to the first and last meeting.

14. Through their deliberations Members have discounted two options:
15. To continue with existing emergency cover arrangements, accept the daytime availability risk and to no longer put in place the daily relocation of firefighters to mitigate those risks.
16. To continue with the existing emergency cover arrangements and introduce three additional day staffed stations at an extra additional cost of £2.25 million
17. In summary, the status quo was rejected because of the inequality of response service across North Wales, the risks involved to firefighters and to the public and the costs involved.
18. Members indicated that they wished to consult on those options which seek to meet the aims of the ECR by reallocating existing firefighters to new day staffed stations.
 - **Option 1** This would mean that the 12 rural firefighter posts and 28 wholetime firefighter posts from Rhyl and Deeside station would be reallocated to the three new day staffed stations. Cover for Rhyl and Deeside would change to a day crewed model similar to the model which currently operates at Colwyn Bay, Llandudno, Bangor, Caernarfon and Holyhead. This will continue to be in addition to the existing RDS firefighters who crew the second fire engine at all these stations.
 - **Option 2** An alternative model which provides an improved emergency cover by introducing three new day staffed stations, but also realises savings of £1.1 million towards the increase in 2024/25 budget, currently estimated at £6 million thus limiting the year on year increase to £4.9m. This option changes the crewing model at Rhyl and Deeside to a day staffed model, which leaves the night time cover to be provided solely by the RDS firefighters and removes the third appliance from Wrexham. In total this sees a reduction in 22 wholetime firefighter posts.
 - **Option 3.** Changes are in line with option 2, however, only two day staffed stations are introduced and the closure of 5 RDS fire stations is included. This is a reduction of 36 wholetime and 38 RDS firefighter posts realises savings of £2.4m thus limiting the year on year cost increase to £3.6m.

19. It should be noted that option 3 does not have the professional support of the Chief Fire Officer. This is because it does not improve emergency cover, reducing the number of households in North Wales who are able to receive a response within 20 minutes by 2,087. It also removes 74 firefighter posts which reduces the capacity of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) to deal with any future Major Incidents. In addition, any possible merger of RDS fire stations can only be considered in the future when the three additional day staffed are in place and providing guaranteed day time emergency cover

CONSULTATION

20. The Authority is obliged to consult the public when considering major service change under a variety of legal obligations including the Equality Act 2010, the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 and common law.

21. In April 2023, the Service engaged The Consultation Institute (tCI), a not for profit, well-established institute promoting high-quality public and stakeholder consultation in the public, private and voluntary sectors. They have been used across the sector including Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

22. The Institute will provide qualified peer review and a Certificate of Consultation Readiness to ensure that the Authority is adopting best practice in line with a Consultation Charter, and that any full public consultation is delivered to the required standard.

23. A key element of the consultation process is that of pre-consultation. This includes focus groups with a range of stakeholders including blue light partners, community groups, local authorities, staff and representative bodies. The purpose of pre-consultation is to gain a wider insight and understanding to inform the decision making and to shape the full consultation.

24. During pre-consultation a variety of different scenarios have been explored through a series of workshops, seminars and focus groups, during which insights and feedback from a wide range of people has been gathered to inform the Authority decision making process. Key themes arising from this engagement included:

- Finance – Understanding the budgetary pressures.
- Future risks – Climate change and new technology may place more demand on resources.
- Prevention and protection – how will our engagement with the public and businesses be affected.
- Communication - Key to aid understanding of the challenges faced and impacts of any proposals.

25. The Service concluded its pre-consultation activities with the guidance and support from the Consultation Institute in June, to ensure consultation readiness in time for a full consultation process.

26. Following approval from Members, it is proposed to commence a public consultation on 21 July to 22 September 2023. The results of which will be presented at the Fire Authority Meeting on 16 October 2023.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	Any options must meet the Authority's obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
Budget	No budgetary implications at this stage, however any proposed changes to Emergency cover will have implications for both capital and operational budgets in future years
Legal	The Authority is obliged to consult the public when considering major service change under a variety of legal obligations including the Equality Act 2010, the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011, the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015 and common law. The main body of the report sets out how the authority proposes to fulfil those obligations
Staffing	No decision has been made yet which will impact on staff. However, in deciding on options to be consulted on staff will be impacted by the proposed changes within the options.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The impact of these aspects will be assessed at the appropriate point in the development of the Emergency cover proposals through integrated and equality impact assessments.
Risks	Reduces the risks of not being able to respond to emergencies effectively and efficiently in the communities of North Wales.