



Developing the Fire and Rescue Service for the future.

Public consultation.

Spring/Summer 2017

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INTRODUCTION

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority regularly runs public consultation exercises when it invites the general public and anyone else with an interest to give their views on fire and rescue services in the area.

In some years the Authority asks about specific proposals that it has drafted, and in other years it invites more general views about the future development of fire and rescue services in the area. The comments received are then taken into consideration when the Authority comes to make its final planning decisions.

Since 1996 the Authority has maintained an excellent record of improving public safety for those who live, work and visit North Wales and of managing its resources responsibly. However, that success is not enough. By law the Authority must keep trying to improve its services in the short term as well as considering the well-being of future generations of people in the area. Moreover, it has to consider the costs involved – there would be little point in planning a service that is going to be unaffordable.

Following the county council elections in May 2017 the new Authority will be developing its plans for fire and rescue services in North Wales. In March 2017 the Authority committed to consult publicly on the steps to be taken during 2018/19 towards achieving its long-term well-being goals. As regards the budget for 2018/19, the time constraints arising from the May election process and establishing the new Authority mean that budget-setting for 2018/19 will necessarily be based on known and anticipated costs for that year.

We are therefore inviting comments and suggestions that the Authority can consider as its members decide on the strategic direction of the fire and rescue service over the coming years.

We would like to hear from as many people as possible and would be grateful to receive your comments, views and ideas **by the end of July 2017**. Details of how to submit these are given on page 12. Thank you for participating in this year's public consultation.

ABOUT NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE

There are three Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales. North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority has been providing fire and rescue services in the counties of Anglesey, Gwynedd, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Wrexham since 1996.

The Authority is made up of 28 elected county councillors nominated by their own council to serve as members of the Authority. In this capacity they are expected to act in the best interests of the whole of North Wales, not just their own county area.

The Authority makes decisions about the level of fire and rescue services in North Wales, and sets its annual budget to match that level of service.

What services does North Wales Fire and Rescue provide?

The Authority has legal duties to provide:

- Fire prevention and community safety education
- “Blue light” response to fires and non-fire emergencies
- Enforcement of fire safety in non-domestic premises
- Planning and response to large scale and serious emergency situations

It is also able to work with other organisations to improve people’s lives in different ways. For example, it has recently worked with:

- the Welsh Ambulance Services Trust responding to life-threatening medical calls (“co-responding”) and also to people who have fallen at home and, although not injured, need assistance to get up;
- North Wales Police helping to search for missing persons.

How much does North Wales Fire and Rescue cost to run?

Around £33million per year – the equivalent of around £47 for every North Wales resident. This money comes from the six county councils in North Wales who contribute money into a central fund that is used to provide fire and rescue services across the entire area. How much each county council contributes depends on the size of its population – the more people who live there, the higher the contribution from that county.

ABOUT THE AUTHORITY'S LONG-TERM OBJECTIVES

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires certain organisations in Wales to formally adopt long-term objectives that contribute to Wales achieving defined well-being goals that were set at a national level by the Welsh Government¹.

At the beginning of 2017 North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority adopted two long-term objectives:

- **to support people to prevent accidental dwelling fires and stay safe if they do occur;**
- **to do all that it can to make sure that North Wales can continue to rely on having first class fire and rescue services (prevention and emergency response) available.**

The Authority published its first Combined Improvement and Well-being Plan² in March 2017. This Plan for 2017/18 presented the thinking behind these two long-term objectives and explained how the Authority will be taking steps towards achieving them over the coming months.

Evidently, such long-term objectives will not be achieved in just a few months, and the new Authority (convened after the May 2017 county council elections) will want to develop its own plans for 2018-19 and beyond.

¹ The well-being goals refer to Wales in future being prosperous, resilient, healthier, more equal and globally responsible, and having cohesive communities, a vibrant culture and a thriving Welsh language.

² <http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk/media/337608/final-combined-improvement-and-well-being-plan-2017-18-english-with-amended-cover.pdf>

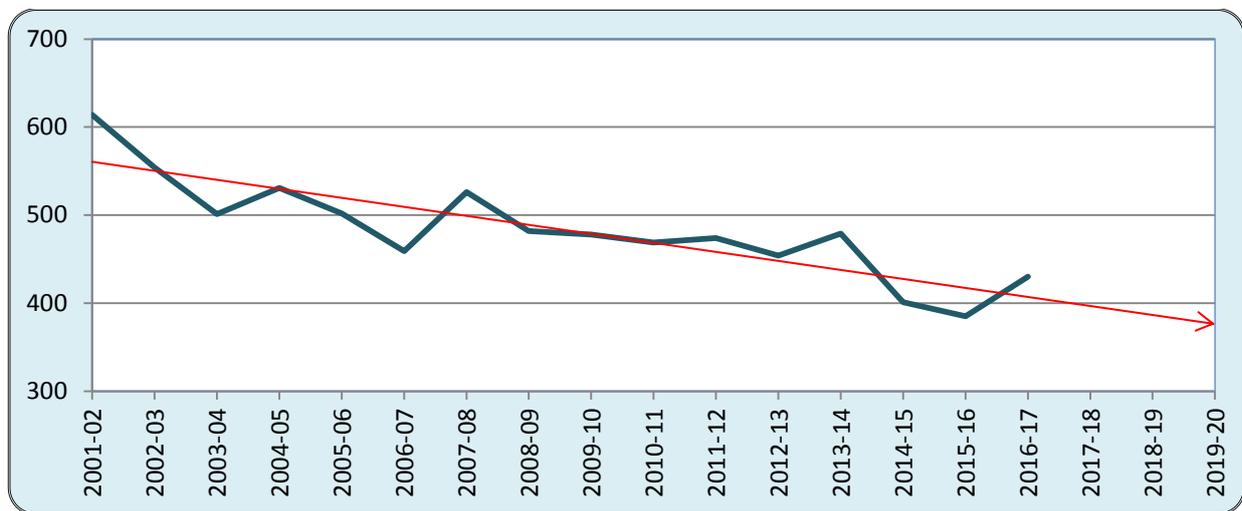
WHAT COMES NEXT?

What does the Authority want to do in the long term?

A. North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority wants to support people to prevent accidental dwelling fires and stay safe if they do occur.

Why does the Authority want to do that?

Thanks to a successful community fire safety strategy there are far fewer accidental dwelling fires in North Wales these days despite an increase in both the population and the number of dwellings.



Graph illustrating the reduction in accidental fires in dwellings in North Wales.

Rather than taking action only when a fire occurs, the fire and rescue service has been investing much more time and effort in educating and supporting people to keep themselves and each other safe by preventing fires from starting in the first instance and reacting correctly if one does start.

How will the Authority do that?

In 2017/18 the fire and rescue service will be continuing to deliver its comprehensive programme of prevention activity - including delivering 20,000 'safe and well checks' in homes - and a range of other activities as described in the Authority's Combined Improvement and Well-being Plan (see previous page for web link).

What next? What do you think the Authority should consider?

Past public consultations have consistently shown that very few people would argue with having prevention of dwelling fires and associated casualties as the Authority’s primary objective. But what are the implications of this for the Authority? For example, what should it consider when allocating part of its annual budget to prevention work? Are there particular sections of the community that you think it should be focussing more attention on? Is there something that it could do differently to be even more effective in future? What would be a good way to approach this as a long term objective?

Whatever your thoughts on the matter, please share them with us.

<p>Consultation question 1</p> <p>What would help the Fire and Rescue Authority to: a) bring about a further reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fires; and/or b) support future generations of people to stay safe if they are ever confronted by an accidental dwelling fire?</p> <p>If you can include an explanation of why you hold this particular view, then please do so as that could help us to understand more about the point(s) that you raise.</p>

What else does the Authority want to do in the long term?

B. North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority wants to facilitate high quality, responsive and better integrated fire and rescue services so that prevention activity and emergency response continue to be available when and where required, affordably, equitably and on the basis of risk.

Why does the Authority want to do that?

The indications are that the UK population will increase and that people will be living longer. This is likely to result in a higher ratio of retired people to working age people³, meaning that the demand for public services (notably social care and health) will increase but the amount of money being generated to pay for public services will decrease.

The pressure to cut the cost of running public services is already great, so the backdrop of a changing population profile presents a real risk to the future quality and/or availability of fire and rescue services in North Wales (and elsewhere). The Authority has already reduced its running costs by several million pounds despite many unavoidable, externally-driven cost increases⁴, but financial pressures remain and the Authority must continue to plan to maintain its own affordability.

Also, there is an increased expectation that public services will work more closely together so that they are more efficient, effective and economic and also so that people's welfare can take precedence over which organisations have traditionally delivered which services.

It makes sense to use all parts of the public sector in the most effective way possible, up-skilling and equipping staff so they can step in to help people without needing to call out a different service. Multi-skilled staff who can deliver more than one service is one way of getting a better designed service at lower cost.

³ According to the Office for National Statistics there have been 4 people of working age (16-64 years) for every 1 person aged 65+ in the UK since at least 1975. By the year 2025, however, that ratio is predicted to fall to 3 people of working age for every person aged 65+, and by the year 2035 to just 2 people of working age for every person aged 65+.

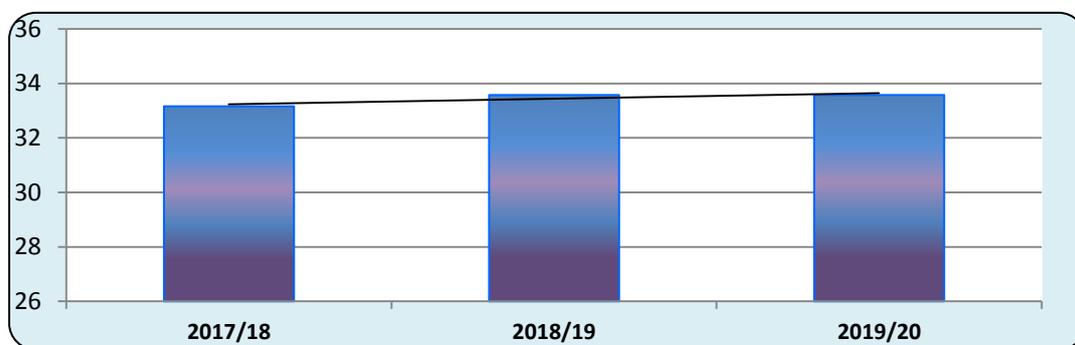
⁴ Between 2010/11 and 2017/18 following long periods of frozen budgets and absorbing unavoidable cost increases without closing fire stations, removing fire engines from service or making compulsory redundancies of firefighters, the annual budget has increased by 4% from £31,772,011 to £33,161,277, rising during that time from the equivalent of £46 to £47 per head of population.

How will the Authority do that?

There are two aspects of this that we would like to hear your views on – the financial planning aspect and the service diversification aspect.

Financial planning

Having maintained a frozen budget and reduced its running costs between 2010/11 and 2014/15, and again in 2015/16 and 2016/17, the Authority approved a new financial plan for the following three years that increased the annual budget by 4% in 2017/18 and by a further 1.3% in 2018/19.



As illustrated in the graph above, the proposed gradual increase in the Authority's annual budget over the course of its three-year financial plan would be underpinned by the use of reserves and kept low by service cost reductions.

The actual amount of externally-driven cost increases is as yet unknown. The Authority has no powers to influence these, but will nevertheless be expected to fund them. Consequently, the Authority will be keeping its spending plans flexible over the coming months so that it can react as and when decisions are taken nationally and information becomes available.

The relative proportions of a) increased contributions from county councils b) use of reserves and c) service reductions will be for the Authority to determine.

In its public consultation in 2016, the Authority explained the various options that it had identified for ensuring that its services would continue to be affordable with the available budget until at least 2019/20, so closing an estimated 'funding gap'.

At that time, the Authority's preferred option for closing the funding gap was to increase the county councils' contributions by £1.4million from 2017/18, and then to cut the cost of the service by £0.9million from 2019/20.

The Authority recognised that reducing annual running costs by £0.9million would have a significant impact on the Service and that savings of that magnitude would affect the number of operational firefighters employed.

One example of where £0.9 million could have been taken out of the budget was to remove the wholetime staffing of one of the three fire engines currently located at Wrexham fire station (the only one that has three fire engines).

In response to a question about this in the Authority's 2016 public consultation, over half (53.1%) of respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed that this would be a good way of achieving the savings, almost a third (27.0%) either strongly agreed or agreed, and almost a fifth (19.8%) selected the neutral option of 'I don't agree or disagree'.

Acknowledging local resistance to the possibility of reducing costs in this way, the Authority decided in March 2017 not to pursue this line of thinking at that point, preferring instead to leave this for members of the new Authority to consider after the local elections in May 2017.

The contributions from the county councils were increased by £1,275,434 in 2017/18 – less than the originally proposed £1,400,000 – but underpinned by £414,000 from reserves, making a total increase of £1,689,434.

<p>Consultation question 2</p> <p>In deciding how to fund the fire and rescue service, what should the new Authority consider when determining the balance between a) increasing the financial contributions from the county councils, b) using up its financial reserves and c) reducing some of its services?</p> <p>If you can include an explanation of why you hold this particular view, then please do so as that could help us to understand more about the point(s) that you raise.</p>
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Service diversification

In relation to the current expectation that public service sectors will work more closely together to protect people's welfare more effectively and economically, the Authority asked in its public consultation in 2016 whether people thought it made good sense for the fire and rescue service to diversify what it does now that the number of fires has reduced. Over half of the people who responded to this question (56.8%) either strongly agreed or agreed that this should happen, more than a quarter (26.2%) neither agreed nor disagreed and the remaining 17% either strongly disagreed or disagreed.

Consultation question 3

What are your views on the fire and rescue service taking on new roles in the community now that the number of fires in the area has reduced?

If you can include an explanation of why you hold this particular view, then please do so as that could help us to understand more about the point(s) that you raise.

HOW TO TAKE PART IN THIS PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Please think about the questions raised in this document and submit your views, comments and ideas to North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority **before 31 July 2017.**

The questions we are asking this time are intentionally 'open' – the new Authority (after the May 2017 county council elections) will be interested to hear a range of views and perspectives when it starts to develop its plans for 2018/19 and beyond.

We encourage anyone who lives or works in North Wales or who has an interest in how fire and rescue services should develop in the area to respond in one of the ways shown below. We have provided a response form for convenience, but would be happy to receive responses as letters or e-mails if you prefer.

By post to:

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
Ffordd Salesbury
St Asaph Business Park
St Asaph
Denbighshire, LL17 0JJ

By e-mail to:

futurefire@nwales-fireservice.org.uk

Please submit your comments before 31 July 2017:

RESPONSE FORM – SPRING/SUMMER 2017

About you (for replies from private individuals)	
If you live in the UK, in which county do you live?	
Are you employed by North Wales Fire and Rescue?	YES/NO

About you (for replies from organisations)	
If you are responding in a professional capacity or on behalf of an organisation, please include the relevant details of your position/organisation.	

If you can include an explanation of why you hold a particular view, then please do so as that could help us to understand more about the point(s) that you raise.

Consultation question 1

What would help the Fire and Rescue Authority to: a) bring about a further reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fires; and/or b) support future generations of people to stay safe if they are ever confronted by an accidental dwelling fire?

Your response:

Consultation question 2

In deciding how to fund the fire and rescue service, what should the new Authority consider when determining the balance between a) increasing the financial contributions from the county councils, b) using up its financial reserves and c) reducing some of its services?
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Your response:

Consultation question 3

What are your views on the fire and rescue service taking on new roles in the community now that the number of fires in the area has reduced?
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Your response:

Please submit your comments before 31 July 2017