

Report to	Executive Panel
Date	20 March 2023
Lead Officer	Richard Fairhead, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Richard Fairhead
Subject	Overview of Emergency Cover Review



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 A working group for North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) Members took place on 14 March 2023. During this meeting, Members were given a presentation by Assistant Chief Fire Officer Richard Fairhead and ORH . This was to introduce the purpose of undertaking an Emergency Cover Review and the methodology to be used. This report outlines the information presented to the Working Group.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2 That Members note the contents of this report.

BACKGROUND

- 3 In the Chief Fire Officer's (CFO) situational assessment presented to the Authority on 20 September 2021, a number of key risks facing the Authority were highlighted. In summary, these were associated with maintaining sufficient availability of on-call fire crews; ensuring sufficient resources to maintain and develop firefighter skills; and having enough corporate capacity to meet current and future demand.
- 4 In response to this paper the Authority agreed to request the CFO to initiate a programme of reviews into key critical areas, notably of on-call crew availability, training, corporate capacity, and emergency response cover.
- 5 They also agreed that, in the first instance, the cost of scoping out and planning these reviews should be met from reserves.
- 6 In addition; Audit Wales undertook a review of "Corporate Resilience in North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority" in April 2021 and made the following Proposals for improvement – "To support resilience the authority should review station locations to identify opportunities to optimise emergency response arrangements."

INFORMATION

- 7 As a predominantly on-call (retained) service, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) places a heavy reliance on having sufficient on-call firefighters available to crew fire appliances throughout the day and night. Only eight of the Service's forty-four fire stations have wholetime crews, so over 80% of the Service's fire engines are crewed by on-call firefighters.
- 8 As Members are aware, there are many challenges and vulnerabilities associated with the on-call (retained) duty system nationally, primarily around the recruitment and retention of on-call firefighters, resulting in a continuous strain on the Service to address the deficit.
- 9 In 2016, following a public consultation, the Authority considered how it wanted to rebalance resources to match risk, and adopted a model that included ensuring that there would be a minimum of 20 strategically located fire crews available in North Wales.
- 10 The Service continues to maintain the minimum 20 fire crews model by focusing on 20 key locations in order to maximise fire cover across North Wales. By a number of means, 20 fire engines are crewed within those locations on most days but it is becoming increasingly difficult to do so. In 2023/24 the Service will pilot a target of 18 fire engines in response to the budget agreed for the forthcoming year.
- 11 When faced with an emergency incident of any significance, the Service has in the past had to request cover from a neighbouring Service in England. This is particularly concerning and it is worsened when much of the Service's emergency response time is taken up responding to weather-related incidents. With the effects of climate change, the impact on the Service is likely to increase in coming years as it is called to more frequent and more protracted incidents such as large outdoor fires and widespread flooding events.
- 12 It is therefore prudent for the Authority to commission work to develop a medium-term emergency response cover proposal in order to generate options for the Authority as to how best to ensure more sustainable fire and rescue cover across North Wales.

- 13 The independent company of ORH has been commissioned to work in partnership with the Service to provide Members with options for consideration.
- 14 Potential options for change and their implications are to be provided to the next Members working group on 04 April 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	Any options must meet the Authority's obligations under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
Staffing	No known impact on staffing levels
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
Risks	Reduces the risks of not being able to set a balanced budget and plan appropriately in future years