

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	17 April 2023
Lead Officer	Richard Fairhead, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Richard Fairhead
Subject	Progress report on the Emergency Cover Review



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide members with an overview of the purpose of undertaking the Emergency Cover Review and the methodology which will be used. This report outlines the information presented to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) Members working group which met on 14 March 2023 and 04 April 2023.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2 That Members:
 - i) note the contents of this report.

BACKGROUND

- 3 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."
- 4 In addition, the Chief Fire Officer's (CFO) situational assessment presented to the Authority on 20 September 2021, highlighted a number of key risks facing the Authority. 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.
- 5 In response to the CFO's assessment the Authority members agreed to initiate a programme of reviews into key critical areas including emergency response cover.
- 6 The Service has engaged with an independent company with vast experience in examining emergency cover to assist in providing the Authority with options to consider for providing fair and sustainable emergency cover across North Wales, considering future demand and future risks.

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. This has become more and more difficult to achieve without incurring high costs and in 2023/24 the Service will pilot a target of 18 fire engines in response to the budget agreed for the forthcoming year.
- 10 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.
- 11 The independent company, ORH, have been commissioned to work in partnership with the Service to provide Members with options for consideration. They have collated a large amount of data, including previous incident information, population numbers, demographic data, road network information, current and future risks along with other data sets and used these to model a number of options on how emergency cover could be provided in North Wales which were presented to the next Members working group on the 04 April 2023.
- 12 The suite of options that were presented included:
 - a. A model that maintains our current station profile with an increase of up to 3 additional day staffed stations which would require an increase in costs;

- b. A model which maintains our existing station locations but redistributes staff and allows an increase of 5 day-staffed stations which would be cost neutral;
- c. A model which also keeps our station locations and redistributes staff which allows an increase of 3 day-staffed stations;
- d. A model which keeps our wholetime station locations and includes 1 additional day-staffed station but closes 5 On-call stations.

13 Members were informed of the costs and risks attached to each option and each proposal was discussed at length. The intention is to bring a recommendation which will go out for public consultation to the next Fire and Rescue Authority meeting in July 2023.

14 **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