

Report to	Executive Panel
Date	12 December 2022
Lead Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Subject	New Training Centre



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 This report presents an update on the work undertaken to date on the production of a detailed business case for the option/s of a new training and development centre in North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is committed to the provision of essential operational training to its staff to support service delivery and firefighter safety. The Chief Fire Officer's assessment undertaken during 2021 identified training as a priority area and Authority approval was given to undertake a full review on the future delivery of operational training and development in the Service.
- 3 This has included a review of current operational training facilities in the Service, including those located at Dolgellau and Rhyl Fire Stations. This identified the need to invest in training and development facilities to ensure operational preparedness and safety, both in terms of existing and future provision. In particular, the need to provide practical and immersive training experiences across a range of scenarios will require investment in new training facilities.
- 4 The review of operational training facilities in the Service also supports the recent findings of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's thematic review of operational training within the Welsh Fire and Rescue Services, which recognises the requirement for significant capital investment required to replicate real-world conditions for firefighters to develop and refresh their skills in a training environment.
- 5 Following approval by the Authority at its meeting on the 17 October 2022 to allocate a budget for the development of a detailed business case for a new training and development centre, a number of options have been explored by the project team. This worked includes the identification of a suitable piece of land to locate the new training and development centre in North Wales.

- 6 The next stage of the development of the business case includes entering into an exclusivity agreement with the landowner, so the required due-diligence can take place prior to recommending and seeking an approval from the Authority for land purchase.

RECOMMENDATION

- 7 It is recommended that Members:
- (i) note the background to review of training provision, including the Chief Fire Advisor for Wales' thematic review;
 - (ii) note that the current training provision is reaching its end of life;
 - (iii) endorse the inclusion of a budget for the purchase of land in the 2023/24 budget setting, noting that this will be subject to separate approval following the conclusion of due diligence; and
 - (iv) note the timescales set out in this report for the provision of a detailed business case for Members' consideration.

BACKGROUND

- 8 At the meeting of the Authority September 2021 the three main priorities for the Service were presented by the Chief Fire Officer in her assessment and approved by Members. They included improving availability, improving training and strengthening the corporate structure.
- 9 The report presented to the Authority on the 17 October 2022 recommended that an initial budget was allocated to the new training centre project, to support the area of improving training.
- 10 Following approval, the new training centre project team have consulted with staff, building construction professionals, sustainability experts and an architect to develop a high-level design for a new training and development centre in NWFRS. This has also included the identification of a piece of land assessed as being suitable regarding geographical location and size.

INFORMATION

- 11 The Service has undertaken a detailed review of its operational training facilities at Rhyl and Dolgellau fire stations and as a result it has become apparent that, they do not provide the facilities required to train firefighters operating in a modern-day fire and rescue service.

- 12 Although the fire house training facility at Dolgellau fire station continues to be used for operational training, it requires significant investment to extend its medium-term life span for risk critical breathing apparatus and firefighting tactics training across a range of scenarios faced by our firefighters. It is also located in an area of North Wales which is a considerable distance for the majority of our staff to travel and attend breathing apparatus courses.
- 13 During the past decade the Authority will have noted the number of fires and other emergency incidents have reduced significantly. Although this is a success story for the fire prevention work that has taken place in our communities during this time, it has resulted in the risk of firefighters having less exposure to the hazards and complex situations they are likely to face when attending such incidents.
- 14 Fire contaminants is also a risk present in the smoke and toxic flammable gases released during fires and may contribute to cancer and other health conditions in firefighters. So, the management of fire contaminants needs to be included in training and development centre design, operational procedures and fire and rescue service culture.
- 15 To mitigate these risks, operational training and development for our staff in a realistic and immersive training environment which includes adequate health and safety measures, needs to be at the forefront of a new training and development centre design, to provide essential facilities required for training and development for at least the next 25 years in the Service.
- 16 At the meeting of the Fire Authority on the 17 October 2022 the recommendation to allocate an initial budget to the project was approved, which included the option to enter into an exclusivity agreement with a landowner of a site assessed as being suitable regarding size and location.
- 17 Since the meeting of the Authority, suitable land for locating a training and development centre has been identified and following conversations with the land agent, the next phase of the project will be to enter into an exclusivity agreement with the land owner. This will allow the Authority to undertake site suitability surveys and a pre-planning application with the local planning office.

- 18 In accordance with best practice for project management, following the meeting of the Authority in October 2022 a Project Initiation Document (PID) has been developed by the project team that has been approved by the Service Leadership Team and members of the Land and Property Committee. The PID sets out the timescales of the whole project, including decision and approval points for the Authority during the lifecycle of the project.
- 19 It is anticipated that the next phase of the project, which includes entering into a land exclusivity agreement and pre-purchase site surveys will be concluded by the 31 March 2023. Following this phase, the results of the site surveys and a pre-planning application to the local planning office will be reviewed and recommendations for site purchase may be presented to the meeting of the Fire Authority on 17 April 2023 dependent on the outcomes.
- 20 Therefore, the inclusion of a budget to purchase land from April 2023 will be presented to Members as part of the 2023/24 budget setting process although formal approval by the Authority will be sought following the conclusion of the due diligence.
- 21 Separate to the purchase of land, the detailed business case for the new training and development centre is scheduled to be completed for July 2023 and will be brought to Members for further scrutiny and approval at that time.
- 22 Following approval of the business case proposals a detailed timetable will be developed although it is envisaged that building work could commence during early part of 2025 following a planning application, detailed design brief development and procurement of a main contractor.
- 23 Members will be kept updated and informed on the progress of the project as it develops during the proceeding months.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	This project is aligned to all of the Well-being and Corporate Objectives 2022/23 and will promote firefighter safety, support operational preparedness and ensure sustainability over the longer term
Budget	£250,000 has been funded from reserves to develop a detailed business case for the options of a new training and development centre in NWFRS. An additional budget will be required for land purchase and building costs, should the business case be approved.
Legal	The Authority has a duty under the Health and Safety legislation to ensure the sufficiency of training of its staff, management of risks such as contaminants. The project also addressed the wider legal obligation to reduce carbon emissions.
Staffing	Project team and stakeholders are included in the Project Initiation Document (PID) for approval at Service Leadership Team. The project supports staff health and safety and wellbeing.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	Implications for the protected characteristics are covered within the PID Integrated Impact Assessment.
Risks	All risks are included in the PID risk register.