

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	28 April 2025
Lead Officer	Anthony Jones, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Planning and Policy
Contact Officer	Mike Plant, Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation
Subject	Emergency Cover Review



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) with an update on the work of the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Task and Finish subgroup. This was set up in response to the recommendation from the 20 January 2025 meeting for officers to continue to devise and test alternative solutions with representative bodies, within the agreed budget, to address emergency cover in rural locations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 Since January 2025, there have been five meetings of the ECR Task and Finish subgroup. The Group consists of FBU officials and officers from the Transformation Team. The group has worked together to revive an option from the Task and Finish Group in July 2024 that proposed how posts could be utilised differently if the self-resilience in the current establishment on all wholetime fire stations was more robust. The subgroup revisited this option and worked to jointly produce a draft Collective Agreement.
- 3 The Collective Agreement sets out measures to improve the self-resilience within the current duty system across the 8 Wholetime/Day crewed stations. This will allow for other posts within the establishment to then be incorporated into pilots to provide a more effective and efficient model of emergency cover across the whole of North Wales.
- 4 The principles of the Collective Agreement have been agreed which include the need to finalise associated policies and complete an equality impact assessment. In addition, local FBU officials have advised that it is necessary to obtain sign off from the National General Secretary.
- 5 It is proposed that the Collective Agreement will be implemented from 1 September 2025 on a pilot basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

6 It is recommended that Members:

- i) **Note that officers have continued to work with representative bodies in social partnership to develop a way forward with the ECR;**
- ii) **note that progress has been made in the drafting of a Collective Agreement with it being agreed in principle by the Fire Brigades Union at a meeting of the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee on 4 April 2025;**
- iii) **appreciate the continued efforts of all parties to progress a solution and introduce a pilot to demonstrate the self-sufficiency of the staffing levels at the current wholetime fire stations; and**
- iv) **Acknowledge that by demonstrating this self-sufficiency that there is scope to introduce pilots to utilise posts from the remaining establishment to provide a more efficient and effective emergency cover model across the whole of North Wales.**

BACKGROUND

- 7 During the period of July to September 2023 the Authority consulted the public on three possible options for the future delivery on its emergency response to the communities of North Wales. A decision was taken by the Authority in December 2023 not to implement any of the proposals at that time but to continue to work on variations to the proposals. The proposals in the consultation do, however, remain live.
- 8 A Task and Finish Group comprising of 16 colleagues working at various levels, stations and departments throughout NWFRS, including representatives of the Fire Brigades union (FBU) met on 12 occasions between February and November 2024, during which time they discussed and researched several emergency response models.
- 9 Several options were scoped by the Task and Finish Group including different models for rostering staff differently to release the posts required to base them in additional locations to support the provision of a more efficient and effective emergency cover model. This included how the current rostering arrangements could be more self-resilient. The basis for the Collective Agreement is therefore not a new idea but one that has been revisited by the subgroup before proposals from the public consultation are reconsidered.
- 10 The FBU representatives verbally withdrew from the Task and Finish Group on 11 November 2024.

- 11 On 17 December 2024, the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer met with the workstream leads and the FBU Chair to confirm this position and to thank all those involved for their hard work and diligence.
- 12 At its meeting on 20 January 2025, the Authority reaffirmed its commitment to providing a more effective and efficient emergency cover model across the whole of North Wales to address the risks identified during the emergency cover review that recognised the challenges of providing emergency cover in rural areas and how the use of resources needed to be adapted with no increase to the budget.

INFORMATION

- 13 A Working Group comprising of FBU officials and officers from the Transformation Team started working on the next phase of the ECR project at a meeting on 21 January 2025. They met a total of five times up to the end of March 2025 to draft a Collective Agreement that set out the basis for utilising resources differently to allow for pilots to begin that included aligning shift start times, longer day shifts and scope for other pilots to be developed to base firefighters in other areas of the service to provide a more resilient model of emergency cover.
- 14 The Agreement outlines how the self-resilience in the current duty systems could be enhanced in several ways with the starting point being the alignment of shift start times to make best use of the existing resilience arrangements. This could be realised in the short term though the standard 90 days' notice; however, in the spirit of working together this would commence on 1 September 2025, subject to some further collective work around associated roster and leave policies and procedures. The first full 12-month pilot of an 08:00 start with a 10-hour day shift would then start on 1 January 2026. This would coincide with the start of the leave year and would run for 24 months.
- 15 The Collective Agreement also demonstrates other areas of change such as accommodating more training on duty days to reduce the accumulation of time in lieu and references to an updated Rostering Policy that aims to give more robustness to the leave arrangements and covering shortfalls on shifts.
- 16 The Collective Agreement was agreed in principle by local officials of the Fire Brigades Union on 4 April 2025, but they advised that it must be approved by a National FBU Executive Council Member.

17 Updates were provided at the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee (JCNC) meetings on 19 February 2025 and 4 April 2025 in order that other representative bodies were kept informed.

IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	The ECR outcomes must meet the Authority's obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
Budget	Any solution must be within the approved budget.
Legal	None
Staffing	The Service has continued to work with staff and their representative bodies and will continue to do so. Regular updates are provided at the JCNC and via the Weekly Brief as well as via visits to stations by officers.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) Officer engaged with ED&I groups throughout the consultation. The ECR is within the Community Risk Management Implementation Plan (CRMIP) with feedback also gathered on this.
Risks	The ECR and the work of the Working Group seeks to reduce the risks of not being able to respond to emergencies effectively and efficiently in the communities of North Wales.