

Report to	Executive Panel	
Date	18 September 2023	
Lead Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer	
Contact Officer	Anthony Jones – Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation	
Subject	Emergency Cover Review – Response to Public Consultation	

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide Members with an update on the progress and activities of the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) public and staff consultation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. Following the commissioning of an Emergency Cover Review (ECR) by North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) in September 2021, extensive work has been undertaken and the findings presented to the Member led Emergency Cover Working Group. The group met on five occasions between March 2023 and June 2023. The focus of the group has been to consider options around a future of service delivery model to address the existing challenges and to be able to respond to future operational risks.
3. On the 21 July 2023 the Authority commenced with its public consultation on the three options developed by the Emergency Cover Working Group, following agreement at the meeting of the Fire Authority on the 17 July 2023.
4. This report provides Members with an update on the consultation process and activities undertaken at the mid-point stage. It also summarises the responses received to date from members of staff, public and representative bodies.

RECOMMENDATION

5. It is recommended that Members:
 - i) Note the contents of this report.

BACKGROUND

6. In April 2023, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) engaged The Consultation Institute (tCI), a not for profit, well-established institute promoting high-quality public and stakeholder consultation in the public, private and voluntary sectors. They have been used by many Fire and Rescue Services in the UK including Mid and West Wales.
7. The Institute provides advice, guidance and qualified peer review to prepare organisations for consultation readiness and adoption of best practice in line with a Consultation Charter. When satisfied that best practice has been achieved, tCI issue a certificate of consultation readiness prior to full public consultation to demonstrate that the consultation is being delivered to the required standard.
8. Best practice pre-consultation activities include listening to the views of others via focus groups and workshops. This allows for an analysis of who may be impacted and to what extent, to ensure that the right methods of communicating and engaging with all stakeholders is considered prior to full consultation.
9. At its meeting on 17 July 2023, the Authority approved to commence public consultation between 21 July and 22 September 2023 on the revised options below:
 - **Option 1** This would mean that the 12 rural firefighter posts and 28 wholetime firefighter posts from Rhyl and Deeside station would be reallocated to the three new day staffed stations. Cover for Rhyl and Deeside would change to a day crewed model similar to the model which currently operates at Colwyn Bay, Llandudno, Bangor, Caernarfon and Holyhead. This will continue to be in addition to the existing RDS firefighters who crew the second fire engine at all these stations.
 - **Option 2** An alternative model which provides an improved emergency cover by introducing three new day staffed stations, but also realises savings of £1.1 million towards the increase in 2024/25 budget, currently estimated at £6 million thus limiting the year on year increase to £4.9m. This option changes the crewing model at Rhyl and Deeside to a day staffed model, which leaves the night time cover to be provided solely by the RDS firefighters and removes the third appliance from Wrexham. In total this sees a reduction in 22 wholetime firefighter posts.

- **Option 3.** Changes are in line with option 2, however, only two day staffed stations are introduced and the closure of 5 RDS fire stations is included. This is a reduction of 36 wholetime and 38 RDS firefighter posts realises savings of £2.4m thus limiting the year on year cost increase to £3.6m.

INFORMATION

10. On 19 July 2023, tCI awarded the Service it's 'Certificate of Consultation Readiness'.
11. To ensure that all consultation response evidence is accurately analysed and reported, the Service has engaged a research consultant. They will be providing weekly updates, a mid-point summary and full consultation report to the Authority at its meeting on the 16 October 2023.
12. On 14 August tCI provided the first phase of quality assurance of the Service's ECR consultation against their assurance framework. The consultation is on track to be awarded 'good practice' against the framework.
13. The quality assurance measured the consultation against the first four interventions of assurance; pre-consultation, scoping and governance, project planning and documentation.
14. A summary of the consultation activities and responses at the mid-point, 31 August 2023, is as follows:
 - i) Staff consultation during fire station visits, a middle manager seminar, five supervisory managers meetings, team and watch briefings by station support officers and middle managers and programmed Principal Officer station visits.
 - ii) Seven community engagement events, chaired by a Principal Officer and some attended by Members of the Authority, have been conducted across North Wales. A further 10 are planned during the remainder of the consultation (15 face-to-face and two on-line).
 - iii) Engagement with North Wales Councillors, Members of the Senedd Cymru and Members of the UK Parliament.
 - iv) Attendance at the Royal Welsh Show in Builth Wells, National Eisteddfod in Boduan, Gwynedd, Anglesey Show at Anglesey Showground, Denbigh and Flint Show in Denbigh and Merioneth Show, Harlech.

- v) Media coverage on T.V., newspapers and radio. Messaging through the Service's social media accounts shared across platforms, including paid social media messaging through Facebook.
- vi) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I) consultation events have been conducted with Unique Transgender Deeside, North Wales Women's Centre and Dementia Support. A further five ED&I consultation events are programmed.
- vii) To date we have received 817 online responses to our consultation questionnaire, far exceeding any previous NWFRS consultation response and correspondence from various stakeholders.
- viii) The Service has also received two alternative options from the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), which will be considered as part of the consultation process.

15. The Service continues with its consultation activities, with a mid-point review by tCI scheduled for the 7 September 2023 when they will provide further quality assurance and any recommendations to support the final weeks of the ECR consultation, up to its conclusion on the 22 September 2023.

16. The draft consultation report will be presented to the ECR Fire Authority Working Group on 5 October, with the final report presented to Members at the meeting of the full Authority on 16 October 2023.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The consultation must meet the Authority's obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
Budget	The consultation budget implications have been publicised in the consultation frequently asked questions and have been presented to the Budget, Monitoring and Procurement Committee.
Legal	Our legislation requires that the Authority must consult the public on changes to our emergency cover. The ECR consultation and the best practices the Services is following as recommended by the Consultation Institute support the Authority in meeting these requirements.
Staffing	The Service has conducted extensive direct consultation with staff and their representative bodies during pre-consultation and this continues during the full public consultation. However, in deciding on options to be consulted on staff will be impacted by the proposed changes within the options.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer has created a timetable of engagement events with ED&I groups throughout the consultation. The best practice the Service is following and the quality assurance of the consultation by the Consultation Institute ensures focus on the Authority's requirements in this area.
Risks	The ECR and its consultation reduces the risks of not being able to set a balanced budget and respond to emergencies effectively and efficiently in the communities of North Wales.