

Report to	Fire and Rescue Authority Executive Panel
Date	23 October 2017
Lead Officer	Deputy Chief Fire Officer Dawn Docx
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Subject	Response to the Authority's 2017 Public Consultation



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To summarise the main themes of the written responses to North Wales Fire Authority's 2017 public consultation about the steps the Authority should take towards achieving its improvement and well-being objectives.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 Twenty-eight replies were received to the Authority's public consultation between May and July 2017. Themes identified from the responses related to:
 - front line and core services and responding to major incidents;
 - community safety (accidental dwelling fires); and
 - funding fire and rescue services in the area.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3 That Members note the main themes of the response to the public consultation conducted between May and July 2017.

BACKGROUND

- 4 By law the Authority must strive to improve its services in the short term and consider the well-being of future generations of people in the area. It must develop well-being objectives for itself that contribute to meeting Wales's well-being goals, and take steps to achieve those objectives.
- 5 The Authority is required to review its well-being objectives as part of its arrangements for reporting on them. In doing so, it must assess whether or not its well-being objectives are appropriate, to the extent that:

- they will contribute to the achievement of the well-being goals;
 - the Authority considers it is taking all reasonable steps to meet them; and
 - they remain consistent with the sustainable development principle.
- 6 In planning improvements the Authority has for several years run consultation exercises when the general public and others with an interest are encouraged to give their views on fire and rescue services in the area.
- 7 In some years the Authority asks about specific proposals that it has already drafted. In other years it invites more general views about the future development of fire and rescue services. The Authority is expected to take the comments it receives into consideration when deciding on its plans.
- 8 In March 2017 the Authority decided to consult publicly on the steps it could take towards achieving its long-term well-being goals. The effects of the May 2017 election process and establishing the new Authority meant that budget-setting for 2018/19 would necessarily be based on known and anticipated costs for that year, but the consultation run between May and July 2017 would inform the development of the new Authority's future plans.

INFORMATION

- 9 The Authority's consultation document entitled "*Developing the Fire and Rescue Service for the Future*" was launched on its website at the end of May 2017. This document gave a brief overview of the Authority's planning process and invited comments and suggestions for the Authority to consider when deciding on the steps it should take over the coming years.
- 10 The two long-term objectives that the Authority adopted at the beginning of 2017 were reiterated in the consultation document. These are:
- to support people to prevent accidental dwelling fires and stay safe if they do occur; and
 - to facilitate high quality, responsive and better integrated fire and rescue services so that prevention activity and emergency response continue to be available when and where required, affordably, equitably and on the basis of risk.

- 11 Three intentionally 'open' questions were asked in the public consultation, and people were invited to submit their responses by the end of July 2017. The questions asked were:

Q1. What would help the Fire and Rescue Authority to: a) bring about a further reduction in the number of accidental dwelling fires; and/or b) support future generations of people to stay safe if they are ever confronted by an accidental dwelling fire?

Q2. In deciding how to fund the fire and rescue service, what should the new Authority consider when determining the balance between a) increasing the financial contributions from the county councils, b) using up its financial reserves and c) reducing some of its services?

Q3. What are your views on the fire and rescue service taking on new roles in the community now that the number of fires in the area has reduced?

Consultation methods

- 12 A press release provided a link to the consultation document on the Authority's website, and social media messages were used to highlight the launch of the consultation and maintain awareness. This prompted several media enquiries and interest was fuelled by on-line comments.
- 13 Articles appeared in a number of internal publications to let staff know about the consultation, and 228 stakeholders, subscribers to the Authority's 'Informative' magazine and all Town and Community Councils in North Wales were notified by e-mail.

Response

- 14 Twenty-six people/organisations submitted 28 written responses by letter (7) and electronically (21). Responses came from:
- town and community councils (10) across five counties
 - individual members of the public (7)
 - county councils (3)
 - Assembly Members (2)
 - individual county councillor (1)
 - the Fire Brigades Union (1)
 - the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner (1) and
 - the British Horse Society North Wales (1)

- 15 Twenty-three responses (82%) were received in English and five (18%) were received in Welsh.
- 16 Many responses did not directly reference the three questions asked but nevertheless covered broadly the same areas. Some also took the opportunity to re-visit decisions previously taken by the Authority.
- 17 A number of responses were limited by a limited appreciation of what the Authority already does and the relative costs of particular aspects of the Service. This may be something to consider in future public consultations.
- 18 In relation to improving the Service's prevention work (**Question 1**) a number of the suggestions were for things that the Service already undertakes e.g. analysing information, targeting particular groups of people and tailoring advice, using social media, sharing information about people and working through partnerships, but a few did suggest new ideas such as developing 'apps.' and community-based partnerships through community councils which can be explored by the Authority in future.
- 19 As regards the financial situation (**Question 2**), several responses acknowledged the issue of affordability but nevertheless did not want reductions to front line services. References were specifically made to: resources currently based at Wrexham and another previously based at Llandudno; large animal rescue services; and responding to automatic fire alarms.
- 20 Some suggested that front line services could perhaps be protected by: reallocating money from other functions; raising money from other sources including charging for some services, re-charging other organisations for services provided on their behalf and securing grants; or introducing "*other innovative ways of making efficiencies*". However, none of the proposed solutions directly calculated the scale of transfer that would be required or the feasibility of sustainably obtaining sufficient funds by these methods to address the anticipated shortfall.
- 21 There was a mixed response to using financial reserves, with only limited recognition of the longer term implications of doing so. Some saw merit in spending part, but not all, of the Authority's financial reserves, but others were unclear as to how much would be considered to be a safe minimum level to hold.

- 22 There was more support for increasing county council contributions amongst the responses received from individuals and community councils than amongst the responses from county councils themselves. References were also made to central funding of local authorities (the 'local government settlement') and how that related to fire and rescue funding.
- 23 There was cautious support for the Service taking on new roles in the community (**Question 3**), with general support for collaboration but some apprehension that doing more might jeopardise the Service's ability to react to a major incident or to deliver its 'core' or 'traditional' services. Also, there was a wish to see new roles adding value, not simply reallocating (or duplicating) costs from one part of the public sector to another, and for the Authority to clarify which roles it would be willing to consider. The majority of suggestions for which new roles the Service could undertake were in areas already familiar to the Authority, but there were a few new ideas too (e.g. making better use of the access the Service has to young people to provide different forms of advice) for the Authority to consider.

IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	Consultation responses should be taken into account when planning the steps that the Authority will take in order to meet its well-being objectives in accordance with the sustainable development principle.
Budget	The consultation asked specifically about funding as future plans will be linked to budgets.
Legal	Consulting the public and involving people feature in the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015.
Staffing	There were no staffing implications from undertaking the consultation, but future planning decisions by the Authority could have implications for staffing levels.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The Authority's future planning will be assessed to identify the associated impact on people in terms of their protected characteristics and on the Welsh Language.
Risks	That the Authority fails to comply with its legal obligations and/or to make workable and affordable arrangements for delivering fire and rescue services in its area.