

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority	
Date	17 December 2018	
Lead Officer	Chief Fire Officer	
Contact Officer	Chief Fire Officer (01745) 535253	
Subject	White Paper "Reform of Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales"	

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To inform Members that the Welsh Government has published its White Paper "Reform of Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales".

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 This report brings Members up to date regarding developments in the Cabinet Secretary's proposals to change the finance and governance arrangements for Welsh fire and rescue authorities. It suggests the most appropriate way in which the Authority could respond to the White Paper.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3 That Members:
 - (i) note the publication of the Welsh Government's White Paper "Reform of Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales";
 - (ii) note the workshop for all members being held on 15 January 2019;
 - (iii) agree that, following the workshop, a written response is made to the Welsh Government by the deadline of 5 February 2019. This response is to be formally signed-off by the Chair of the Authority.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 4 The latest information has not been considered by either the Executive Panel or the Audit Committee.

BACKGROUND/INFORMATION

- 5 Members will recall a number of previous reports to both the Authority and the Executive Panel which advised Members of the Welsh Government's signalled intention to make changes to the financial and governance arrangements of Welsh fire and rescue authorities (FRAs).

- 6 On 13 November 2018, the Welsh Government published a White Paper entitled “Reform of Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales”. A copy of the White Paper is attached at Appendix A. As Members will be aware, a White Paper is a policy document produced by the Government which sets out its proposals for future legislation. It provides the basis for further consultation and discussion with interested parties and allows changes to be made before legislative change is finally enacted.
- 7 As reported to the Authority on both 18 June and 17 September 2018, the lead-up to publication of the White Paper involved correspondence between the three Welsh FRA Chairs and the Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Services; informal discussions between those parties; informal discussions between Welsh Government officials and the three Welsh Chief Fire Officers and, significantly, a report compiled by Professor Catherine Farrell and Professor Rachel Ashworth (of the University of South Wales and Cardiff University respectively). A copy of Professor Farrell and Professor Ashworth’s report is attached at Appendix B for Members’ information.

THE WHITE PAPER

- 8 The White Paper is constructed, essentially, in four main sections. These are:
 - the case for change
 - proposals for change to FRA governance and membership
 - proposals for change to the funding model
 - proposals for change to the performance management arrangements of Welsh FRAs.
- 9 In assessing the Welsh Government’s case for change Members will need to take a view as to whether or not the case is made out. It follows, logically, that unless Members of the Authority are persuaded, then it will be difficult to support any proposals that are based on the case for change. Members should consider this point in relation to the Cabinet Secretary’s statement in the foreword that “the status quo is not an option”.
- 10 Given the above, should Members agree that the case for change is sufficiently compelling then it would be appropriate to measure the Welsh Government’s proposals against its stated ambitions. From that analysis, Members should be in a position to form a view as to their support for the Welsh Government’s proposals and/or to make any alternative proposals for change via the Authority’s formal response.

RESPONDING

- 11 Members will note that the closing date for responses to the White Paper is 5 February 2019. It is of vital importance that the Authority makes a considered response to the proposals and that its views are made clear to the Welsh Government.
- 12 At the members' budget workshop held on 16 November 2018, Members indicated their support for a further workshop to discuss the White Paper at greater length, and in more detail, than would be possible within the confines of a regular Authority meeting. To that end, 15 January 2019 has been set aside. The location of the workshop will be advised to Members in due course.
- 13 At the January workshop, Members will be able to comment on and inform a draft Authority response, which is currently being developed by officers. Following completion of the response, it is recommended that the Chair of the Authority gives final approval before submission.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	None identified.
Budget	Change to the Authority's finance and governance arrangements has the potential to affect the Authority's budget position in the future. Any legal advice that may be sought is not budgeted for at this time.
Legal	There are potential legal issues around amendments to, or repeal of, The North Wales Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1995. Legal advice may need to be sought at a future date.
Staffing	None identified.
Equalities/Human Rights/Welsh Language	None identified.
Risks	There is the potential for any change to the Authority's finance and governance arrangements to affect its delivery of services to the North Wales community, particularly if the budget position is negatively affected.