

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority



Public Consultation

We are seeking your views on developing an Environment and Sustainability Strategy for 2020 onwards.

Introduction

Who is this consultation aimed at?

If you have an interest in the future of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, then this consultation is aimed at you.

Every year, before deciding on its plan for the following year, North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority invites comments on a particular subject. The ideas, insights and different points of view that people contribute can be really helpful for making sure that the Authority's plan for the following year is a good one.

You don't need to be an expert in environmental issues to respond. All that the Authority asks is that you think seriously about the issues and submit your views, ideas or information by the deadline.

What is this consultation about?

This year the Authority is asking about developing a long-term Environment and Sustainability Strategy. What do you think that Strategy should include? What should be at the forefront of the Authority's thinking in terms of planning for the next 20 or 30 years? What ideas do you have for the services that it might provide in the next decades?

Looking back over the past 30 years, we have seen significant changes in how people live and also what local people expect to contribute towards, and receive from, public services. What do you think is likely to happen over the next 30 years? Is there anything specific to North Wales that needs to be considered?

Climate change, environmental responsibility, social responsibility...what would you like to see in the Fire and Rescue Service's plans for the future? Everyone knows that it is a Service that has changed and adapted to a great extent over the years. But waiting until the last minute before reacting is rarely the best way of doing things, which is why the Authority needs to plan ahead with an adaptable long-term strategy.

We hope you find the information provided useful and that this will encourage you to submit your views before 31 December 2019. Details on how to respond are available at the end of the document.

Background information

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority operates across the six county council areas of North Wales, serving an estimated resident population of just under 700,000 people, over a land area of 2,375 square miles.

It employs close to 900 people in full- and part-time roles, with over a third of its workforce being fluent Welsh speakers.

Its emergency response is organised around 44 fire stations located across North Wales, with a fleet of 54 fire engines and 35 other appliances including environmental protection units, aerial ladder platforms, narrow access vehicles, foam carriers, boats, technical rescue and incident command units. It also maintains a 'white' fleet of over 100 vehicles for non-emergency work.

The Fire and Rescue Service responds to over 5,000 emergency incidents a year, many of which are weather-related. In hot dry years, outdoor fires are more prevalent, and in cold wet years, it is more usual to see an increase in chimney fires, flooding and storm events. Some years, of course, there are periods of both hot dry weather and cold wet weather. Last year, 14% of incidents attended were non-fire emergencies, with the remainder an equal percentage of fires and false alarms.

It spends an annual revenue budget of over £35million, with around 71% of that going on employee costs, 20% on non-pay costs, 10% on capital financing; and the equivalent of 1% being received by way of income.

The Authority takes its prevention role very seriously, allocating resources to schools programmes, safety campaigns, media messages, audits of non-domestic premises, visits to people's homes to advise on home safety, arson reduction and work with particular groups such as farmers and landowners. Not only does this prevention activity make sense in terms of public safety, but it also helps protect built and natural environments, agricultural land and important habitats, and contributes to cleaner land, air and water.

As a Category 1 responder under the Civil Contingencies Act, the Service remains available to respond to large scale events that could threaten serious damage to the welfare of people, wildlife, the environment and primary supply chains.

Similarly, it must remain available for mass decontamination of people after chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incidents.

Why adopt a new Environment and Sustainability Strategy for 2020 onwards?

The Authority can be proud of what it has already achieved in terms of its environmental policies, but it needs to continue to do more. In 2010 the Authority adopted a Sustainable Development Plan. In 2011 it set up a Sustainability Development Board to help drive down its energy consumption and reduce the environmental impact of its buildings and vehicles. In 2013 the Authority re-committed to its Energy and Environmental Policies and a programme of improvements in its consumption of fuel, utilities and resources; its management of waste; and its promotion of biodiversity.

With the introduction of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, the Authority turned its attention to complying with this new legislation and finding ways of working with other organisations to improve the environmental as well as the social, economic and cultural well-being of future generations of people in Wales. One of the key requirements of this Act is for the Authority to act “in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 paved the way for the Welsh Government to set interim greenhouse gas emissions targets for 2020, 2030 and 2040 (leading up to at least an 80% reduction by 2050) and five-yearly “carbon budgets” that set limits on the total amount of emissions that can be emitted in Wales. .

In March 2019, the Welsh Government published its low carbon plan for achieving a low-carbon Wales. Soon afterwards, it declared a climate emergency to strengthen and galvanise climate change action at home and internationally. One aim relates to reducing the carbon footprint of Welsh products by introducing a more resource efficient (circular) economy. Part of enabling that would be through public sector procurement to stimulate the market.

In June 2019 the Welsh Government further committed to achieving a 95% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, with an ambition to reach net-zero.

Will Climate Change really affect the Fire and Rescue Service?

Yes, we think it will. As long ago as 2006 a research report¹ published by the UK Government recognised the impact that climate change would be likely to have on fire and rescue services:

“Climate change will bring more frequent, hot, dry summers, warmer wetter winters and an increased frequency of extreme weather events, such as heavy downpours and flooding, summer droughts, and coastal flooding.

[...] climate change will lead to an increase in the frequency of hot summers and therefore to an increase in the number and severity of grassland and forest fires, requiring significant extra effort from Fire and Rescue Services. These summers are also predicted to be very dry, which may lead to water shortages. Water shortages during the summer will impact on Fire and Rescue Services in the UK in both training and fire fighting.

It is also shown that increased winter rainfall and higher sea levels will lead to an increase in the frequency of flooding events during winter.”

The natural environment is vital for well-being; it provides air to breathe, food, drinking water, clothing, medicines, building materials and provides green spaces for leisure pursuits, however, according to the Future Generations Commissioner² Wales is now among the most nature-depleted countries in the world. It has the worst air quality in the UK and still emits high levels of greenhouse gases. It faces an increase in the risk of large scale flooding and soil erosion and is facing the extinction of 1 in 14 wildlife species.

The Authority's vision is to be an environmentally conscious and responsible organisation which is important because not only do more frequent extreme weather events like flooding and grassland fires have a direct impact on the demand for our services, they also present significant financial risk to the Authority.

By working with partners, the Authority hopes to bring together stakeholders and communities to tackle climate change in the hope that neighbourhoods can be strengthened and additional benefits can be created through the knowledge that by acting together a better future is achievable.

We think that the most likely impacts will be on the Authority's:

- Response to emergencies;
- Prevention activity;
- Corporate actions and responsibilities.

These are considered in more detail on the following pages.

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government: “*Effects of Climate Change on Fire and Rescue Services in the UK. Fire Research Technical Report 1/2006*”.

² <https://futuregenerations.wales/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Resilient-Wales-Topic-1.pdf>

1. Responding to emergencies

Safeguarding the natural environment is an important aspect of the Service's operational response to emergencies.

By law the Authority must make provision for:

- extinguishing fires, which can occur outdoors as well as in buildings, vehicles, etc.;
- protecting life and property in the event of fires, both from the fires themselves and from any other secondary hazards (e.g. chemicals released during fires);
- rescuing people and protecting them from serious harm in the event of emergencies involving flooding or inland water;
- responding to large scale events that could threaten serious damage to the welfare of wildlife and the environment, as well as to people and/or primary supply chains.

The legal requirements extend to making sure that the people who tackle the emergency incidents are properly trained and equipped to do so.

Also, by law, the Authority has powers that enable it to take any action it considers appropriate (including securing equipment) in a situation where people or the environment (including the life and health of plants and animals) could be seriously harmed.

What are your views on our future response to emergencies?

Please feel free to tell us about anything that you think the Authority should consider in relation to responding to emergencies. You might also find the following helpful as prompts

- Are there any particular challenges in North Wales that the Authority should be considering in terms of planning its emergency response capability for the next 20 or 30 years?
- Should the Authority be thinking about adapting its firefighter training or the equipment that they use to improve its emergency response?
- What sorts of changes do you think will happen in North Wales (or beyond) that the Authority needs to start planning for?
- What, if anything, might prevent the Authority from being able to protect the environment, habitats, plants, animals and watercourses, in future?

2. Prevention activity

The Authority has been investing in prevention work for several years, and is committed to the principle that preventing an emergency in the first instance is always better.

A lot of its work is about preventing fires in dwellings because that is where people are at greatest risk of being killed or injured by fire. Also, its statutory obligations in relation to prevention are aimed first and foremost at preventing *fires*.

Its prevention work in dwellings has been very successful. When we asked the public in 2015 whether the Authority should keep the reduction of accidental dwelling fires as its primary objective, over 92% of the responses said that it should.

However, Service staff do undertake prevention work in other areas too, such as in relation to deliberate fire-setting (arson) and controlled burning by landowners.

What are your views on our future prevention activity?

Here are some more prompts, but, once again, please feel free to tell us about anything that you think the Authority should consider in relation to its prevention activity.

- Given a choice, would you want to see the Authority continuing to focus on preventing dwelling fires, or should it change its emphasis more towards preventing outdoor fires?
- Other than preventing fires, is there anything else that the Authority could realistically turn its prevention expertise to?
- Can you see the Authority's prevention work changing in future? Or perhaps you think the change should start now? If so, how?

3. Corporate activity

Behind all the prevention activity and emergency 999 response is a wide range of corporate activities. Without these, the 'front line' activities would not be achievable. There would be no public reporting or accountability, no financial management, no-one to take care of, for example: procuring equipment; servicing vehicles; checking hydrants; keeping phones and computers up-to-date and working; buying and paying for goods and services; looking after fire stations and the land around them; employing, training and paying staff; keeping records and reporting information.

Similarly, the Authority would not be able to meet its many legal obligations for aspects such as health and safety, security checks, safeguarding, equalities, civil contingencies planning, Welsh language standards, data protection, freedom of information; and, of course, planning services for future generations and protecting the environment.

In terms of developing an Environmental Strategy, this is an opportunity to consider what might prevent the Authority from delivering its services in future, and the positive and negative effects of the Authority's activities on the environment. However, the issues are complex. Consider, by way of examples:

- Extinguishing fires has a positive effect on the environment, but what about the carbon footprint of the equipment needed to do that? What about the Service's use of water to extinguish fires? Investing in new equipment raises questions of affordability. Changing policies and procedures raises questions of capacity and risk.
- Updating computers protects against cyber attacks on the Service's electronic systems, but what about the environmental impact of replacing computers? Staff time and resources are not infinite – what should the Authority be considering when trying to balance its environmental responsibilities against all its other responsibilities?

What are your views on our future corporate activity?

- How could the Authority make itself more environmentally efficient as an organisation?
- What principles should it apply when balancing its need to deliver emergency services and its corporate responsibility towards the environment?
- What ideas do you have for how the Authority could a) reduce its negative effects or b) increase its positive effects on the environment?
- What more could the Authority do? Are there, for example, any fundamental changes that it should be working towards now that will make it more environmentally efficient in the future?

How to respond

Please send us your ideas and opinions using the contact information below:

By post to:

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
Ffordd Salesbury
St Asaph Business Park
St Asaph
Denbighshire, LL17 0JJ

By e-mail to:

futurefire@nwales-fireservice.org.uk

By accessing our online consultation hub;

<http://www.yourvoicewrexham.net/kms/elab.aspx?noip=1&CampaignId=914&CampaignStepTestId=-1&CampaignStepQuestionTestId=-1&CampaignUserRole=test>