

Report to	<b>North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority</b>
Date	<b>20 April 2026</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Anthony Jones, Assistant Chief Fire Officer</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Mike Plant, Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation</b>
Subject	<b>Emergency Cover Review Update</b>



## 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) 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 its inauguration in 2025, the ECR group has worked together to jointly produce and agree a Collective Agreement (CA) demonstrating the self-resilience within the current duty system across the 8 Wholetime (WDS)/Day Crewed stations. The CA has allowed for other posts within the establishment to be incorporated into a pilot scheme to provide a more effective and efficient model of emergency cover across the whole of North Wales. The full Pilot is now in its fourth month of operation.
- 3 Whilst only one quarter years' worth of full data was available prior to this report, initial indications are that there has been an overall improvement in the number of appliances available on a daily basis since the start of the pilot, and a reduction in the number of hours being paid at overtime for attendance at stations to ensure availability.
- 4 There has also been a significant increase in the percentage of hours each week that rural fire cover is maintained in Dolgellau and Porthmadog.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5 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 launch of the full pilot scheme of the CA on 1 January 2026; and**
  - iii) Appreciate the continued efforts of all parties to regularly monitor and review the pilot to ensure that it remains fit for purpose**

## BACKGROUND

- 6 At the Authority meeting on 20 January 2025, Members were presented with a progress report, outlining developments since their decision at the December 2023 meeting. They agreed that officers would continue to work with representative bodies to develop solutions to within the agreed budget, to address emergency cover in rural locations.
- 7 A Working Group comprising of Fire Brigades Union (FBU) officials and officers from the Transformation Team started meeting from 21 January 2025 on the next phase of the ECR project. They met with the aim of reinvigorating a proposal from the Task and Finish Group that the 178 posts on the 22 watches across the eight current WDS/Day Crewed stations could be self-sufficient and rely less on the remaining 18 establishment posts to back fill absences. This in turn would allow these posts to be utilised differently to support pilots to base wholetime firefighters in the rural locations identified in the ECR consultation. These meetings resulted in the drafting of a CA as the basis to trial pilots from initially 1 September 2025, until February 2027.
- 8 The CA also agreed to pilot the alignment of shift start times across all eight stations and to extend the day shift at Deeside, Rhyl and Wrexham to 10 hours to increase resilience allowing personnel from each station to provide cover on any other wholetime station if required during the day shift.
- 9 Updates are provided at each Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee (JCNC) meeting in order that other representative bodies are kept informed.

## INFORMATION

- 10 The Collaborative Agreement Implementation Group (CAIG) has now agreed a policy suite that details the principles and working practices of the collaborative agreement in respects of resilience procedures, and which includes a new wholetime rostering policy suite. These documents went through the formal consultation process in October 2025 and have been approved.
- 11 We have implemented the move of our promotion boards for supervisory managers to allow personnel to take up new posts at the beginning of the new annual leave year. These changes will be expanded to all management levels during 2026 to support the collective agreement in full.
- 12 A programme of migration has been delivered from on-call officers to wholetime posts to support the crewing of the nucleus stations at Dolgellau and Porthmadog, providing employment opportunities for our personnel living in those rural areas.
- 13 A programme to fully crew the WDS Rural cadre of personnel has also been completed to ensure that they can further assist existing and nucleus stations in rural areas to enhance resilience and fire cover.
- 14 The pilot involving the provision of two nucleus stations at Porthmadog and Dolgellau to improve rural fire cover began on 2 September 2025. Several visits by the Head of Response and other key officers alongside the facilities team have been implemented to ensure that staff welfare has been prioritised throughout the changes. Facilities have drafted a suite of plans for improvements to be made to both stations to better support the new nucleus crewing model.
- 15 The CA 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 the updated WDS Rostering Policy that aims to give more robustness to the leave arrangements and covering shortfalls on shifts.
- 16 A central repository of information and guidance documents including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) has been placed on the internal intranet, Hwb Tân, for the benefit of all personnel and will be updated after every pilot monitor and review meeting.

- 17 A standard agenda to review the pilot in line with social partnership principles has been agreed with the FBU to ensure that all relevant data is captured to ascertain whether the pilot is performing successfully, or whether it needs further amendments to be introduced in collaboration. Whilst it is still early into the full pilot the initial data captured has shown a slight increase in overall availability and marked increased availability in the rural areas identified.
- 18 The first formal review of the CA between the Chief Fire Officer and the Fire Brigades Union is due to take place on 21 April 2026.

## 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	North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) continues to work with staff and their representative bodies. Regular updates are provided at the JCNC and via the Weekly Brief as well as through visits to stations by Officers.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Officer engaged with EDI 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.