

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	15 April 2024
Lead Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Anthony Jones, Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation
Subject	Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Update



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide Members with the latest position on the progress being made by the newly formed Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Task and Finish Group, established in response to the decision made by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) at its meeting on 18 December 2023 to develop a new permanent option for the provision of emergency cover across North Wales.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 At its meeting on the 18 December 2023, when considering which option to implement from the ECR, the Authority decision was that:
 - *Members request that Officers continue to work with all stakeholders to develop a new permanent option taking into consideration today's decision and the limits of the proposed budget.*
- 3 Expressions of interest were sought from staff working at all levels across Service departments, stations and duty systems and an ECR Task and Finish Group was established in January 2024. The Fire Brigades Union are also represented and have been present at every meeting to date.
- 4 The aim of the ECR Task and Finish Group has been to start afresh, understand the challenges around the current pre-planning and daily interventions needed to support the provision of more equitable emergency cover and then explore how improvements in effectiveness and efficiency can be delivered within the budget.
- 5 The Task and Finish Group are currently focusing on how changes to the current method of delivering the service could provide an improved equity of guaranteed emergency cover across the whole of North Wales, especially during the daytime.

OBSERVATIONS FROM EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

6 This report has not previously been considered by Members.

RECOMMENDATION

7 Members are asked to:

- i) Note the engagement of all stakeholders on the ECR Task and Finish Group to work together to develop options that deliver improvements in emergency cover for the communities of North Wales; and
- ii) note the progress made by the Task and Finish Group to date.

BACKGROUND

- 8 Following the commissioning of an ECR by the Authority in September 2021, extensive work was undertaken to determine the current position and scope proposals for improvement. The findings were presented to the Member led ECR Working Group. The group met on nine occasions between March 2023 and December 2023. The focus of the group was to consider options around a future service delivery model to address the existing challenges and to be able to respond to future operational risks.
- 9 At its meeting on the 18 December 2023, the Authority considered four options for the future provision of emergency cover in North Wales. These included Options 2 and 3 as consulted upon, Option 1a, an improved variation of consultation Option 1 and a Fire Brigades Union Option 4.
- 10 The recommendation to implement Option 1a was not approved by Members of the Authority at its meeting in December and instead Officers were requested to continue working with all stakeholders, including the FBU, to develop a new permanent option for more equitable emergency cover provision across the whole of North Wales.
- 11 Therefore, an ECR Task and Finish Group was established in January 2024 with representation from each duty system and Control, along with staff who plan and manage availability of resources, finance and the Fire Brigades Union. The ECR Task and Finish Group Chair and Vice Chair have been elected from within the group, who have met regularly to discuss options for delivering improvements to emergency cover across the whole of North Wales.

INFORMATION

- 12 The ECR Task and Finish Group held its first meeting on 1 February 2024 and has subsequently met on another three occasions with a fifth meeting scheduled for 3 April 2024. Meetings are conducted in person, across the service area at different venues to increase visibility and accessibility for staff.
- 13 At the first meeting, the group received presentations on the current level of emergency cover provision, the process undertaken every day to cover gaps in emergency cover and the financial constraints that any options have to deliver against. The Terms of Reference were also agreed with a Chair and Vice Chair appointed.
- 14 During subsequent meetings held on the 20 February, 7 March and 19 March, the group have discussed the current response model in depth and examined innovative means of providing a future model that meets the ECR evaluation criteria. The group have also received presentations on alternative emergency cover delivery models from other UK Fire and Rescue Services.
- 15 Following each meeting, group members are tasked with speaking to their colleagues to gauge feedback on the ideas being discussed in order that the wider workforce remain informed on progress. Colleagues are also encouraged to bring their ideas forward to the ECR Task and Finish Group representatives for inclusion in the group discussions.
- 16 The ECR Task and Finish Group have accepted that improvements in emergency cover, particularly in more rural areas of North Wales are required and understand that any proposals they put forward must meet the ECR evaluation criteria used throughout the development of options.

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 Service 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 continued during the full public consultation. However, in deciding on options to be presented, staff will be impacted by the proposed changes within the options
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer engaged 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.