

Report to	Executive Panel
Date	19 June 2023
Lead Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Anthony T. Jones, Area Manager
Subject	Emergency Cover Review Update



PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide members with an update on the progress and activities of the Emergency Cover Review since the overview report presented on 20 March 2023.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That Members:
 - i. Note the contents of this report and the progress made by the Emergency Cover Working Group.

BACKGROUND

3. Audit Wales undertook a review of "Corporate Resilience in North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority" in April 2021 and made the following proposal for improvement: "To support resilience the Authority should review station locations to identify opportunities to optimise emergency response arrangements."
4. In addition, the Chief Fire Officer's (CFO) situational assessment presented to Authority Members on 20 September 2021 highlighted a number of key risks facing the Authority. In summary, these were associated with maintaining sufficient availability of on-call fire crews; ensuring sufficient resources to maintain and develop firefighter skills; and having enough corporate capacity to meet current and future demand.
5. In response to the CFO's assessment, Authority members agreed to initiate a programme of reviews into key critical areas including emergency response cover.

6. To assist the Service in the review of its Emergency Response, an independent company (ORH) with vast experience in examining emergency cover has been appointed. ORH is assisting the Authority during its decision-making process to provide solutions for a fair and sustainable emergency response and resilience across the whole of North Wales, considering future demand, risks and budget.

INFORMATION

7. A representative Working Group of Fire Authority Members, the 'Emergency Cover Review Working Group', was established comprising six Fire Authority Members, one from each Unitary Authority. Details of potential improvements to availability and emergency response and resilience will be examined by the Working Group prior to recommendations being made to the Full Fire Authority.
8. The first meeting of the Emergency Cover Review Working Group took place on 14 March 2023. During this meeting, Members received a presentation by Officers and ORH consultants. This was to introduce the purpose of undertaking an Emergency Cover Review and the methodology to be used. The report to the Executive Panel on 20 March 2023 outlined the information presented to the Working Group.
9. Working Group meetings were scheduled for 4 April 2023, 2 May 2023 and the 5 June 2023, with the option for a final meeting in late June if required.
10. At the meeting of the Emergency Working Group Working Group on 4 April, Members were presented with four potential options that were discussed in detail. It was also explained that there is currently a predicted £6.0 million deficit in the financial planning for 2024/25 that will need to be considered when deciding the future of emergency cover and response in North Wales Fire and Rescue Service. (NWFRS).
11. The four options presented were as follows:
 - **Option 1.** A model that maintains our current station profile with an increase of up to 3 additional day staffed stations which would require an increase in costs.
 - **Option 2.** A model which maintains our existing station locations but redistributes staff and allows an increase of 5 day-staffed stations which would be cost neutral.
 - **Option 3.** A model which also keeps our station locations and redistributes staff which allows an increase of 3 day-staffed stations.
 - **Option 4.** A model which keeps our wholetime station locations and includes an additional day-staffed station but closes 5 on-call stations.

12. In April 2023, the Service engaged The Consultation Institute (tCI), a not for profit, well-established institute, promoting high-quality public and stakeholder consultation in the public, private and voluntary sectors. They have been used by many Fire and Rescue Services in the UK including Mid and West Wales. The Institute provides qualified peer review and a Certificate of Consultation Readiness to ensure that NWFRS is adopting best practice in line with a Consultation Charter and that any full public consultation is delivered to the required standard.
13. Best practice pre-consultation activities include listening to the views of others via focus groups and workshops, analysing who may be impacted by future plans and to what extent, analysing the risks involved with all proposed plans, and ensuring adoption of the right methods of communicating and engaging with all stakeholders so they can get involved and help shape, review and agree any proposal to potentially take to full consultation.
14. Following the Certificate of Consultation Readiness and subject to meeting the required standards, the Institute will provide certification that the Service's consultation planning and activities have been Independently Quality Assured to a standard that meets the requirements of the Consultation Charter and assurance framework.
15. At a meeting of the Emergency Cover Review Working Group on 2 May, the potential options were discussed in more detail utilising information provided by the independent consultant ORH, answering Members' questions from their previous meetings in March and April.
16. Officers also presented an update on the Authority's pre-consultation activity and the feedback received from the various stakeholders that has included blue light partners, community groups, local authorities, staff and representative bodies.
17. Further analysis and modelling to support a more effective and efficient response was presented to members of the Emergency Cover Review Working Group at its meeting on 5 June 2023.
18. The Service continues with its pre-consultation activities with guidance and support from the Consultation Institute, to ensure consultation readiness in time for any potential full consultation process from July to September 2023.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	Any options must meet the Authority's obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015
Budget	No budgetary implications at this stage, however any proposed changes to Emergency cover will have implications for both capital and operational budgets in future years
Legal	Any options must meet the Authority's obligations under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
Staffing	No decision has been made yet which will impact on staff
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The impact of these aspects will be assessed at the appropriate point in the development of the Emergency cover proposals through integrated and equality impact assessments.
Risks	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.