



AGENDA ITEM: 7

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

3rd February 2014

Improvement Objectives 2014-15

Report by Dawn Docx, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To summarise the response to the Authority's consultation on its draft Improvement Objectives 2014-15; and to propose the content of a final draft Improvement Plan 2014-15 for approval by the full Authority at its next meeting in March 2014.

Introduction

- 2 The Authority's Improvement Planning Working Group was presented in February 2013 with a proposed timetable for compiling and publishing its Improvement Plan 2014-15 in compliance with statutory guidance.
- 3 This timetable included a period of public consultation on draft Improvement Objectives before final approval of the Improvement Plan 2014-15 in March 2014.
- 4 The Authority subsequently endorsed three draft improvement objectives for consultation between September and December 2014.
- 5 The response to that consultation should now provide the Executive Panel with a basis for making a recommendation regarding the contents of a draft Improvement Plan 2014-15 to be presented to the full Fire and Rescue Authority for approval at its March 2014 meeting.

- 6 Under statutory regulations, the Authority is required to publish its improvement plans as soon as practicable after the end of December in the year before the year to which they relate. In practice this has been interpreted as being before the end of March.

The proposed Improvement Objectives for 2014-15

- 7 Objective 1 was carried over from previous years, reflecting the Authority's continuing commitment to the prevention of fire deaths and injuries. This was, "To help to keep people and communities safe by preventing deaths and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation".
- 8 Objective 2 related to the Authority's approach to financing the Service as it approached the end of a three-year budget freeze. This was, "To implement a 3-year financial plan for 2014/15 to 2016/17 that funds the current level of service, but that aims to limit the cost of doing so to the equivalent of an extra £1 per year per head of population".
- 9 Objective 3 reflected the Authority's recognition of the need to provide sustainable and affordable fire and rescue services in North Wales in the longer term. This was, "To ensure that North Wales gets the best possible level of service within financial constraints, use a variety of management solutions to optimise fire and rescue cover in the area."

Information

The 2013 consultation.

- 10 The public consultation period on the Improvement Objectives ran between September 16th and December 9th 2013.
- 11 The consultation was made available on the Authority's website, and notification of its availability was sent electronically to a range of local and national stakeholders and partner organisations. Requests were made to selected partner organisations to make the consultation available through their own intranet sites; links were

provided through social media; an article appeared in the local press; and presentations with opportunities for questions were provided for constituent authorities.

The consultation response.

- 12 Eight written responses were received, of which four came from town/community councils, and one from each of the following: Wrexham County Borough Council, the National Trust, Diverse Cymru and the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner.
- 13 The responses reflected broad agreement with the Authority's three proposed improvement objectives, and some used the opportunity within their response to compliment the Service and/or emphasise the value of particular aspects of service delivery as they perceive them.
- 14 Compliments included an acknowledgement by the North Wales Police and Crime Commissioner of the work of the fire and rescue service, and noting its particular contribution to enhancing public safety.
- 15.1 Objective 1. One response expressed "wholehearted support" and another "fully supported" it.
- 15.2 Home fire safety checks were specifically supported (one referred to them as "these brilliant checks"), and there was acknowledgement of the importance of preventing fires. One response noted that the Authority's target for delivering 30,000 such checks had not been achieved in 2012/13, and another proposed that the Authority introduce a plan for dealing with the end of the 10-year period when batteries or smoke alarms will start needing to be replaced. .
- 16.1 Objective 2. There were fewer direct words of support for this objective, but one considered what was being proposed was "reasonable" and another acknowledged the "increasing pressure to make efficiency savings".
- 16.2 Wrexham CBC suggested a slower or delayed implementation to better accommodate its own savings plans.

- 17 Objective 3. There was general support for this objective, with comments including: "appears practical and prudent in the current climate", and "happy with the proposal". Wrexham CBC particularly supported the types of changes that are not immediately evident to the public but which protect front line service delivery.
- 18.1 Diverse Cymru's response took exception to the use of the term "vulnerable people" and suggested that it be replaced with alternatives such as "people who require support" or "people who require safeguarding".
- 18.2 They suggested that, "Where possible, actions should focus on reaching seldom heard groups and those that experience discrimination and disadvantage, rather than purely on people who require support".
- 18.3 This response was by far the most lengthy and detailed, and whilst supporting the Authority's commitment to cross-referencing the known contributory factors to the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, emphasised the contribution that other organisations and representatives of protected characteristics groups could make to planning and designing services. They suggested moving to a co-production model that involves local citizens and organisations in shaping services, and offered to assist with the development of specific work programmes.
- 19.1 The National Trust's response emphasised the need to maintain the level of response to heritage buildings and the people living on site.
- 19.2 This response referred specifically to "call challenge" policies adopted by some UK fire and rescue authorities that reduce responses or provide no responses to Automatic Fire Alarms, and wished to be assured that there is sufficient fire cover and experienced and trained personnel to deal with not only fires in heritage premises but also with such situations as "flooding, unexploded ordinance, marine pollution, landslide, etc.".

- 20 Denbigh Town Council suggested a different duty cover system for Denbigh fire station, and the possibility of a "Youth Section" to the fire service.
- 21 Llandudno Town Council requested that consideration be given to incorporating information in reports and objectives on incidents attended by the Aerial Ladder Platforms.

The Authority's decision on funding for 2014-15

- 22 During the period of consultation, the Authority was alerted to the potential effect of the local government finance settlement in Wales in 2014-15, and took the decision in December to freeze the budget for another year, and to use one off reserves to underpin the budget for that one year. This should not affect the proposed Objective 2.

Recommendation

- 23 Members are asked to approve the production of a final draft of the Improvement Plan 2014-15 based on the same proposals contained in the consultation draft and including additional explanation of: a) what is meant by 'vulnerable' when referring to fires in the home; and b) the Authority's decision regarding its 2014-15 budget.
- 24 This final draft Improvement Plan 2014-15 will then be presented to the full Fire and Rescue Authority at its 17 March 2014 meeting for approval, followed by publication before the end of March 2014.