



AGENDA ITEM: 13

**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
EXECUTIVE PANEL**

3rd February 2014

**DRAFT PUBLIC SERVICES (WORKFORCE) (WALES) BILL:
RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION**

Report by Ruth Simmons, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To inform members of the Welsh Government consultation document 'Supporting our Public Service Workforce through Collective Leadership and Legislation': Consultation on a Draft Public Services (Workforce) (Wales) Bill.

Information

- 2 The consultation seeks views on the proposed Bill which would initially give Welsh Ministers powers to issue specific statutory guidance on the following public service workforce matters and provides for this list to be augmented in the future:
 - collaboration between public bodies in relation to staffing arrangements and recruitment;
 - staffing arrangements where public bodies collaborate in the provision of services;
 - training and development of staff of public bodies;
 - planning by public bodies in relation to the size and composition of their workforce;

- providing members of staff of public bodies (including trade unions representing staff) with information about, and opportunities to contribute to, decisions affecting their work;
 - sharing information about staff and staffing arrangements for the purpose of facilitating any of the matters listed above.
- 3 The public services covered by the draft Bill would include Local Authorities, NHS Trusts and Local Health Boards along with Fire and Rescue Authorities.
 - 4 Members will be aware that the service has a long history of successful collaborative working and actively supports the principle of consultation with employees and their representatives. Advice and guidance on workforce matters is currently provided by competent and qualified Human Resource professionals. It is unclear what specific workforce issues the potential statutory guidance would seek to address and there appears to be an underlying assumption that one solution would be suitable for all the organisations covered by the proposed Bill.
 - 5 Given the extent of the powers contained within the Bill there are grave concerns around loss of organisational independence, flexibility and local accountability. For example, between 2010-2011 and 2013-2014 the Authority was able to successfully implement a three year financial strategy requiring savings of £2.45 million by implementing a workforce resourcing strategy to mitigate the risk of firefighter compulsory redundancies. Under the proposed Bill this could be directed by Welsh Ministers.
 - 6 The Executive Summary of the consultation notes that the power granted by the Bill would be used by Welsh Ministers in particular to support agreements reached at the Workforce Partnership Council (WPC). The role and operation of the WPC would require review should its decisions have the potential to be enforced through statutory guidance. Members should note that NWFRS does not have a seat at the WPC but is represented by Cllr Tudor Davies of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service.

Recommendations

- 7 That Members:
 - (i) note the concerns raised in relation to the Draft Public Services (Workforce) (Wales) Bill;
 - (ii) agree that given the deadline for responding to the Welsh Government's consultation on the Bill that the Authority's response will be approved through the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer.