

***NORTH WALES  
FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY***

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***COMBINED IMPROVEMENT  
AND RISK REDUCTION PLAN***

***2014-15***

***Published March 2014***



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## *Introduction*

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This year's annual Improvement Plan focuses on specific improvement objectives for 2014-15.

At a time of extraordinary financial challenge, the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority is committed to continuing to provide excellent prevention services, fire safety enforcement services and emergency response to a range of incidents including fire, flooding and road traffic accidents.

The Authority remains committed to playing its part in building stronger and safer communities, but also acknowledges that for the future the financial situation means that being able to sustain service delivery will require a great deal of flexibility and innovation.

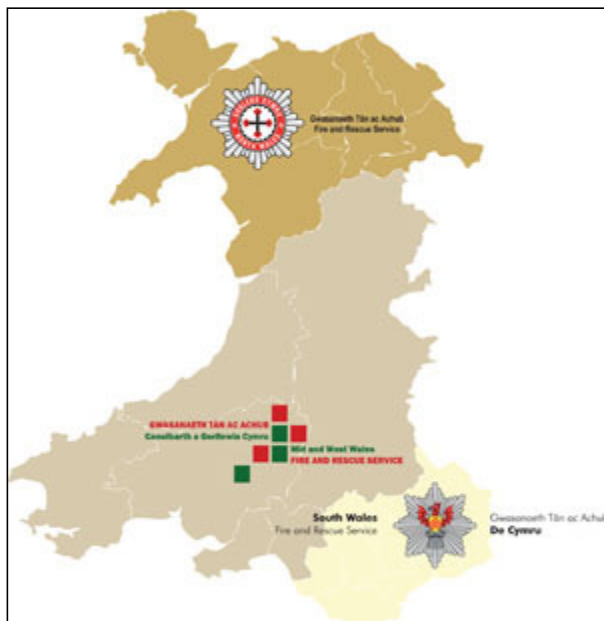
Fire and rescue authorities have been extraordinarily successful in Wales in reducing the incidence of fires, but this cannot be taken for granted, and we do not intend to lose sight of the importance of prevention in reducing the level of demand on fire and rescue services as well as on other parts of the public sector, such as the health service.

The Authority consulted on its draft improvement objectives in the last quarter of 2013, and is grateful for the thoughtful responses it received. This document now sets out its agreed strategic improvement objectives for 2014-15.

**Our mission is to make North Wales  
a safer place to live, work and visit.**

## North Wales Fire and Rescue

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In Wales, fire and rescue services are provided through Combined Fire and Rescue Authorities.

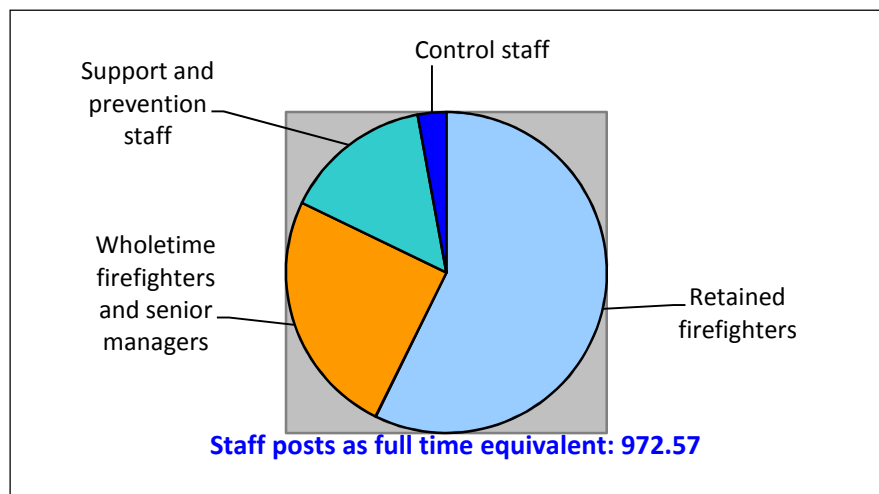
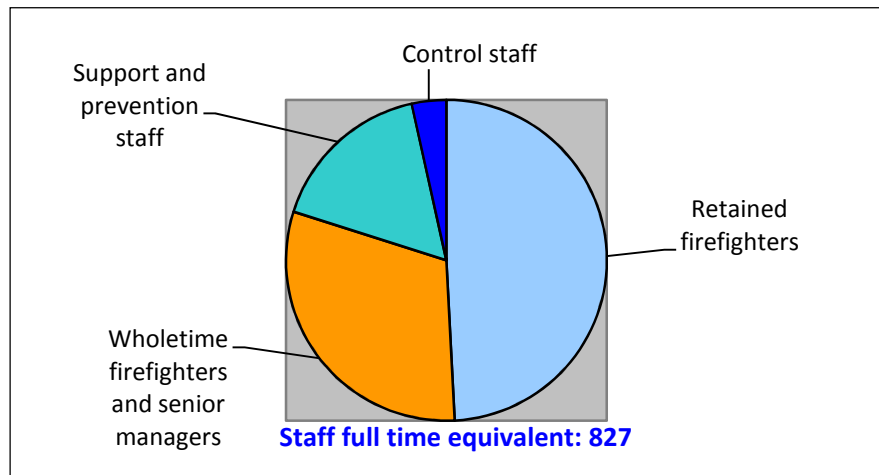
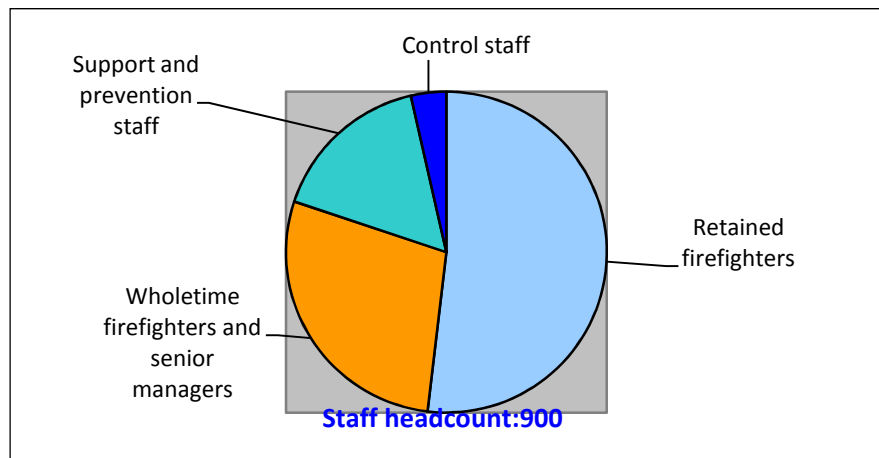
**North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** is one of three combined fire and rescue authorities in Wales. These were set up in 1996 as part of local government reorganisation, and replaced the former eight fire brigades in Wales.

The full **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** comprises 28 county councillors nominated from the six unitary authorities of North Wales: Anglesey County Council (3); Conwy County Borough Council (5); Denbighshire County Council (4); Flintshire County Council (6); Gwynedd Council (5); Wrexham County Borough Council (5). The number of representatives from each constituent authority is determined according to the size of the population.

**North Wales Fire and Rescue Service** is headed by the Chief Fire Officer who has strategic leadership, corporate management and operational responsibility for the Service. He also provides professional advice to the Authority.

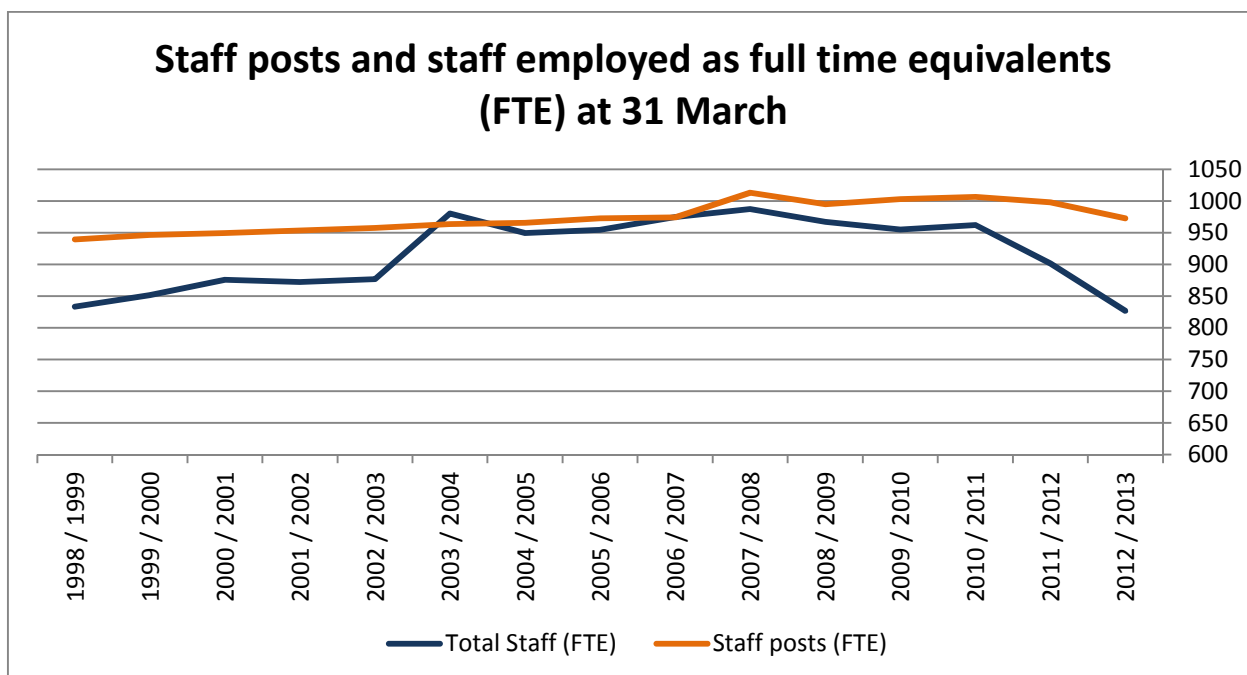
Please refer to the Appendix to this document for details of specific legislation and other information.

# About North Wales Fire and Rescue – Staffing (March 2013)



## About North Wales Fire and Rescue – Staffing

The number of staff posts and staff employed has changed over recent years. The graph below shows the extent of these changes between March 1999 and March 2013.

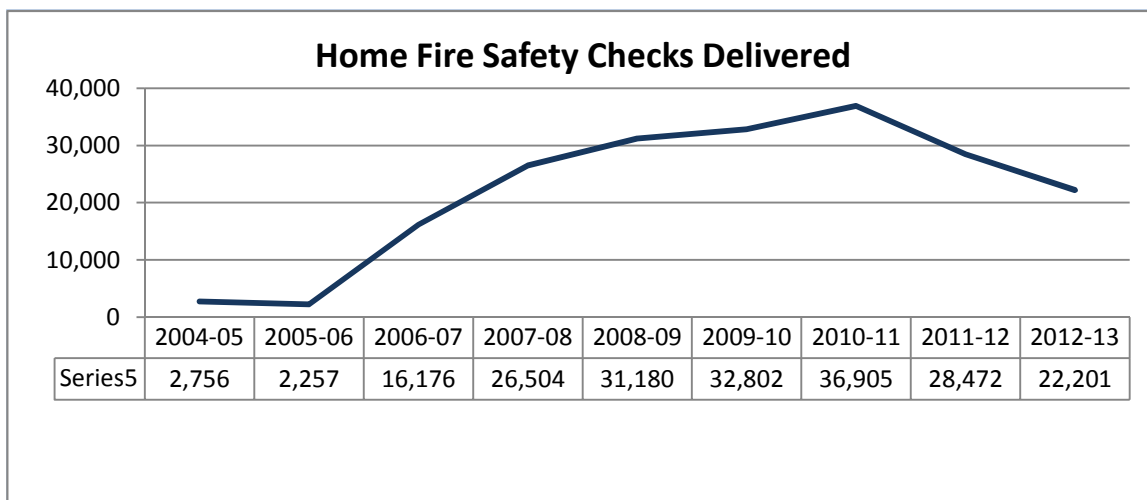


Recent financial pressures have forced a reduction in the size of the workforce, but with careful planning it has been possible to achieve that through natural wastage and voluntary redundancies.

Changes within the organisational structure have involved detailed consideration of matching work to the most appropriate sections of the workforce, bearing in mind skills sets and terms and conditions of service. This has included the transfer of community and business fire safety posts to non-operational staff.

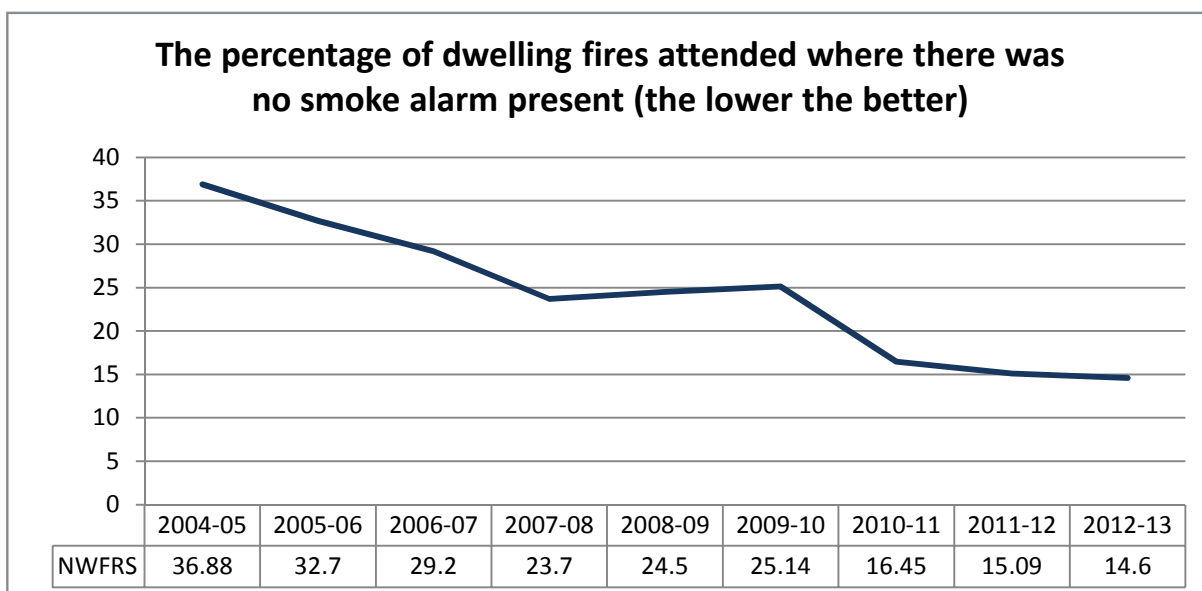
## About North Wales Fire and Rescue – 2004/05 to 2012/13

North Wales’s high profile programme of providing Home Fire Safety Checks has meant that over 200,000 free checks have been delivered to households in the area since 2004.



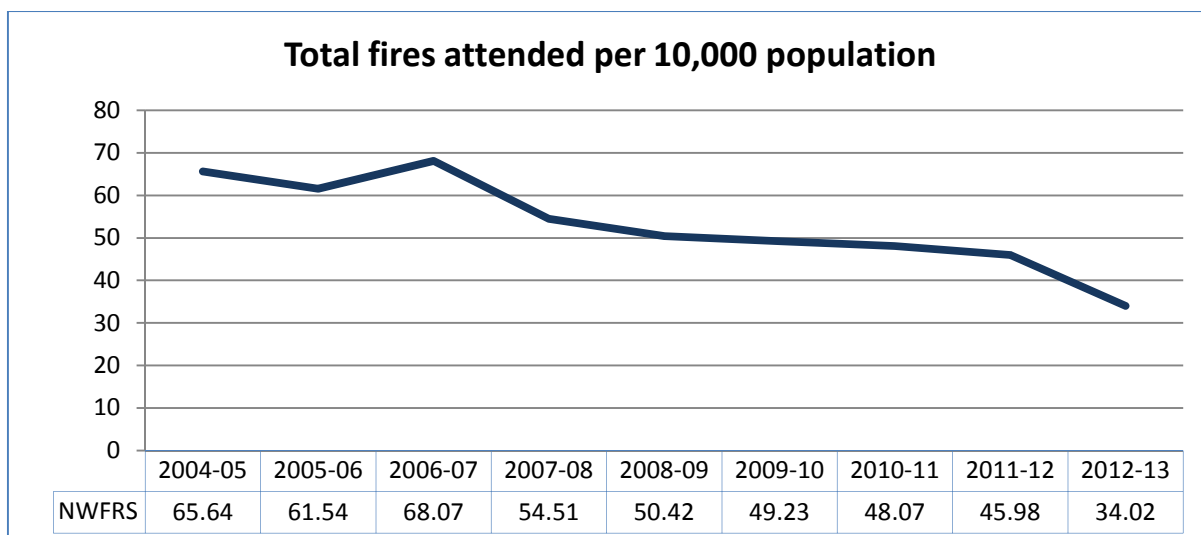
According to the Welsh Government’s National Survey for Wales (May 2013), **93%** of households in North Wales have at least one working smoke alarm.

Only a minority of homes where fire has occurred are found to have no smoke alarm already fitted.

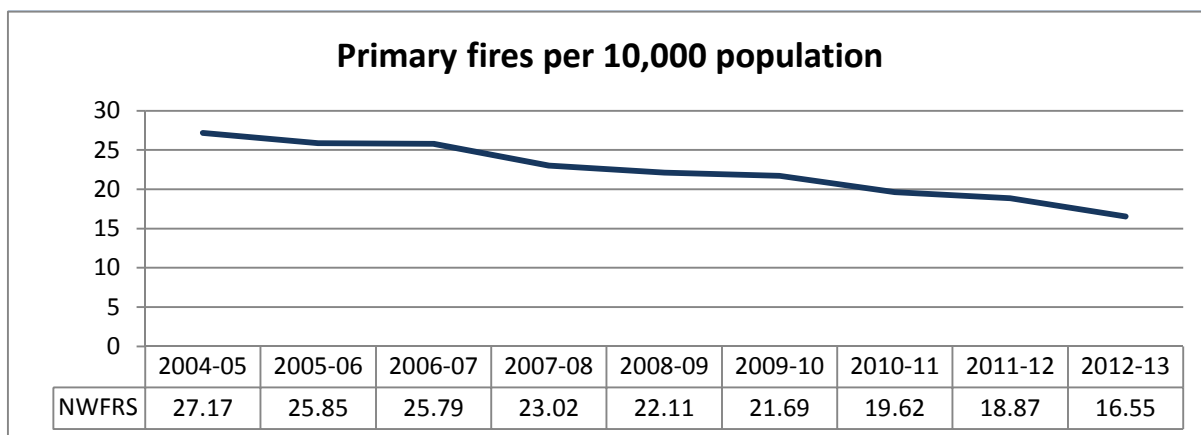


## About North Wales Fire and Rescue – 2004/05 to 2012/13

The fire prevention strategy in North Wales has been very successful. The number of fires attended in the area has almost halved - from 4,414 to 2,349.



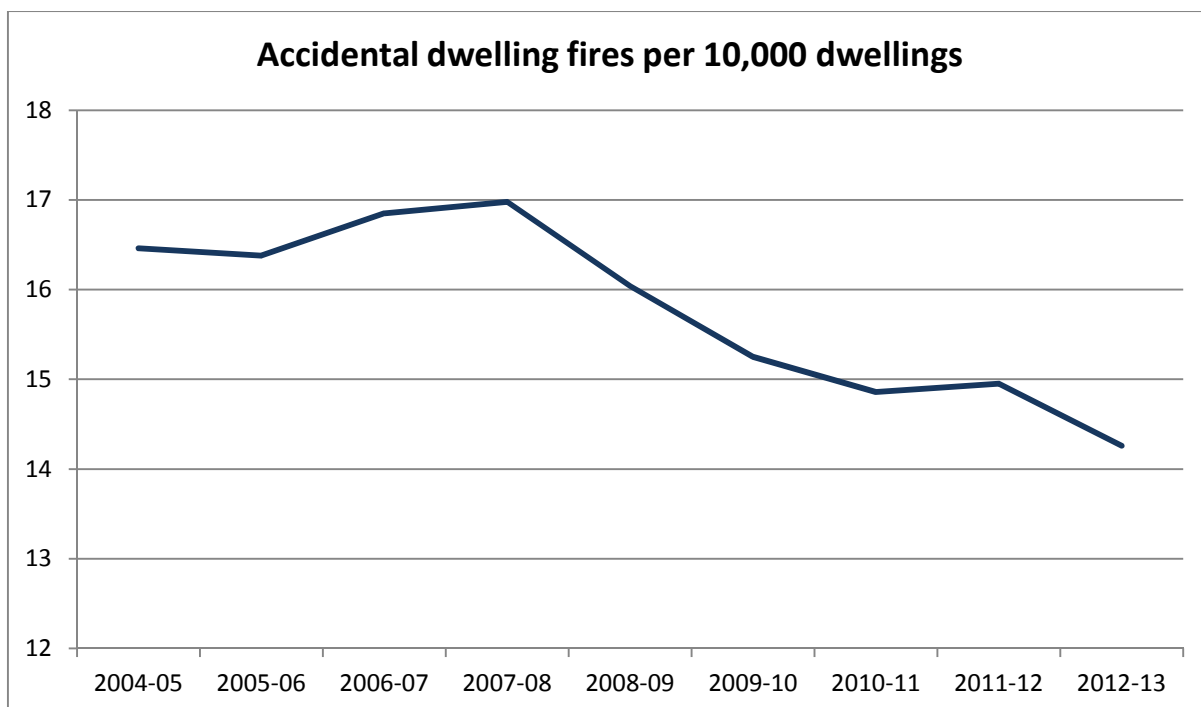
The number of primary fires (that is, the larger fires, involving property and/or casualties) has fallen from around 35 per week to around 21 per week (from 1,827 to 1,143).



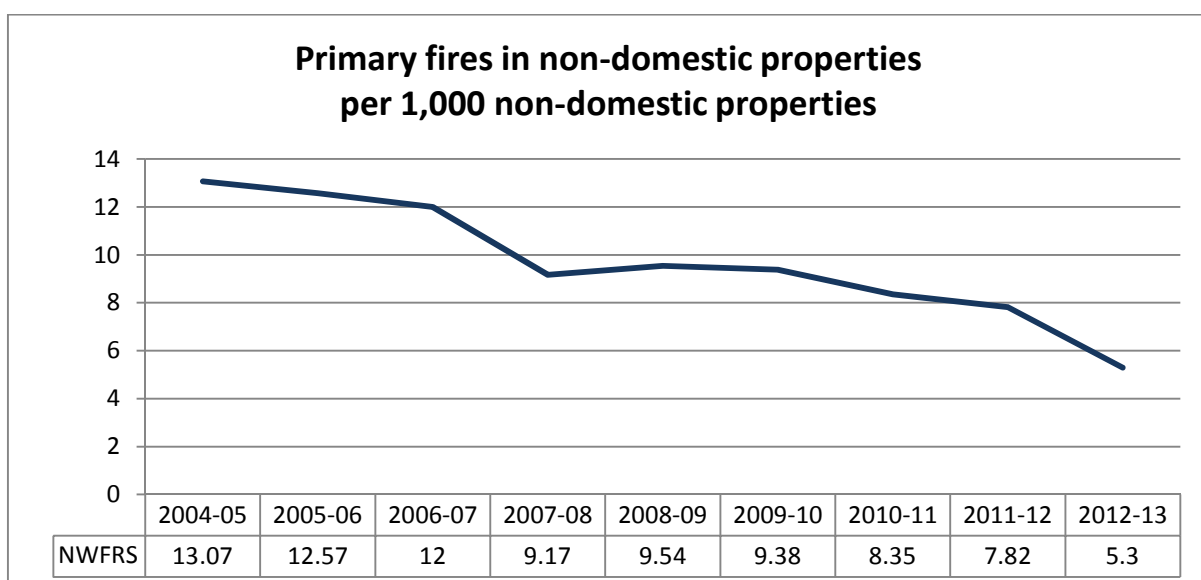


## About North Wales Fire and Rescue – 2004/05 to 2012/13

The number of accidental fires in dwellings in North Wales has fallen from an annual total of 856 to 745 (a welcome 13% reduction).

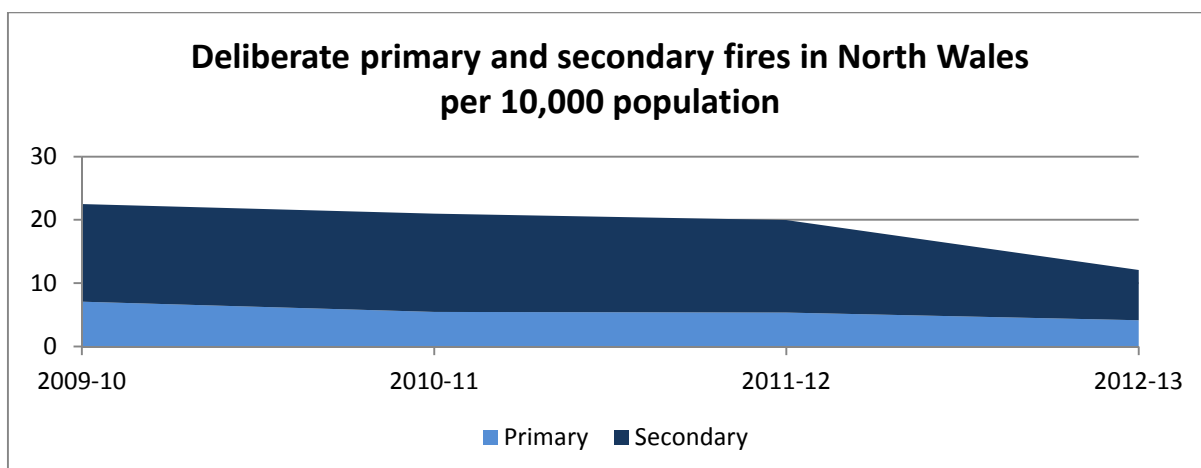


Similarly, the number of fires occurring in non-domestic properties has reduced, from an annual total of 605 to 346.

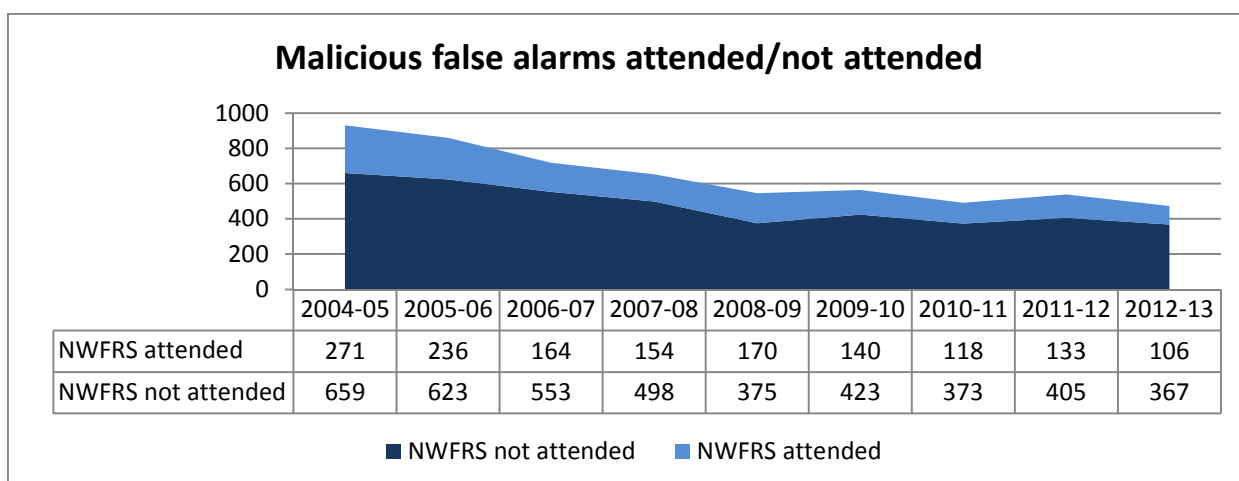


## About North Wales Fire and Rescue – 2004/05 to 2012/13

Through an active and successful collaboration with North Wales Police, the incidence of arson and deliberate fire-setting has also fallen. Per 10,000 population, there have been consistently fewer deliberate fires in North Wales than elsewhere in Wales.



By challenging 999 callers suspected of placing bogus emergency calls, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service has successfully driven down the number of malicious false calls being made to its Control Centre. Of those that are made, Control staff have consistently succeeded in identifying over 70% as malicious before making an unnecessary attendance at a non-existent emergency. In 2004-05, the Service attended around 5 such malicious false alarms per week. By 2012-13 this had been reduced to around 2.



## About North Wales Fire and Rescue – 2004/05 to 2012/13

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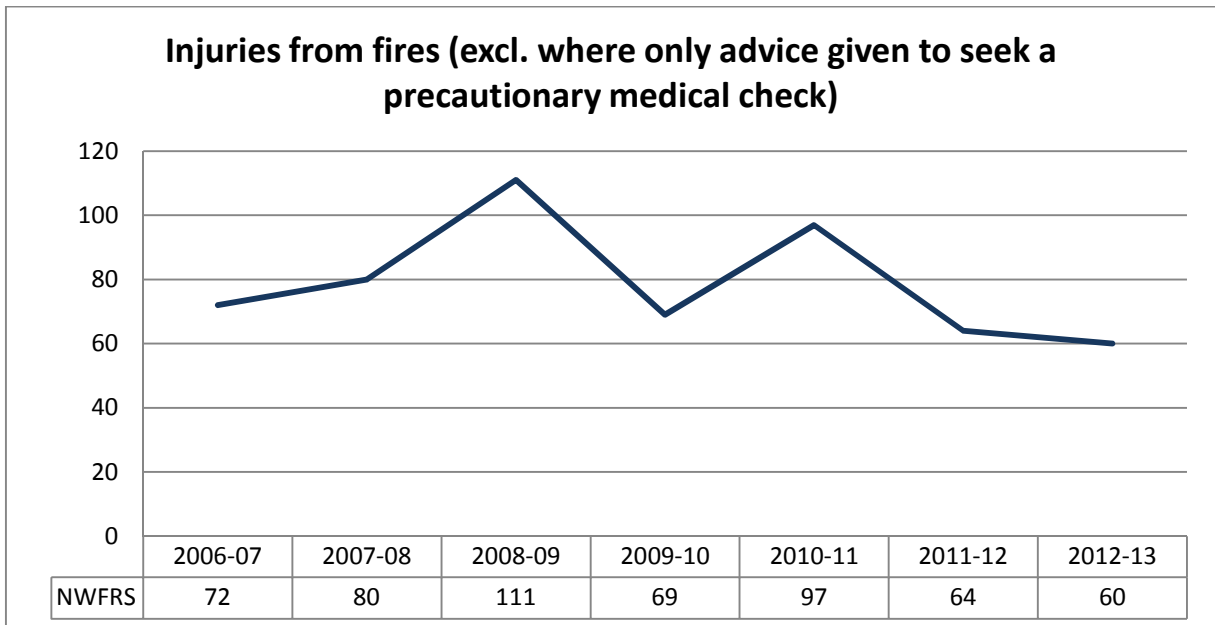
The number of people who die from fires in North Wales has fluctuated between three and thirteen per year. Some people die as a result of fires that were started deliberately (which would include suicide and arson), but the majority are the victims of accidental fires that occurred in their homes.

For North Wales, fire deaths figures as at February 2014 were:

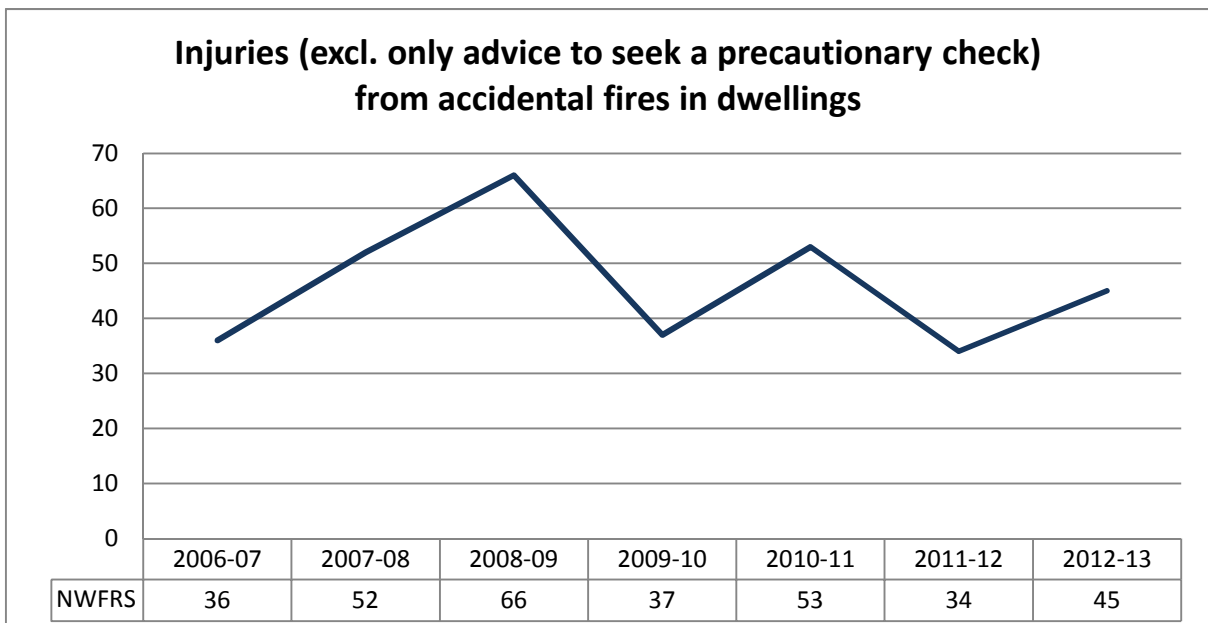
	From accidental fires	From accidental dwelling fires	From deliberate fires	From deliberate dwelling fires	Total fire deaths
2004-05	3	3	1	0	4
2005-06	6	5	1	0	7
2006-07	10	10	3	0	13
2007-08	8	8	2	1	10
2008-09	4	4	0	0	4
2009-10	7	7	2	2	9
2010-11	10	10	0	0	10
2011-12	8	6	0	0	8
2012-13	3	3	5	5	8
	<b>59</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>73</b>

## About North Wales Fire and Rescue – 2006/07 to 2012/13

The number of fire injuries in North Wales is following an overall downward trend, but the rate of reduction in fire injuries has been inconsistent and disappointingly slower than the rate of reduction in fires.



In North Wales - as in the rest of Wales - injuries occur at a rate of approximately one injury per eleven accidental dwelling fires (on average).



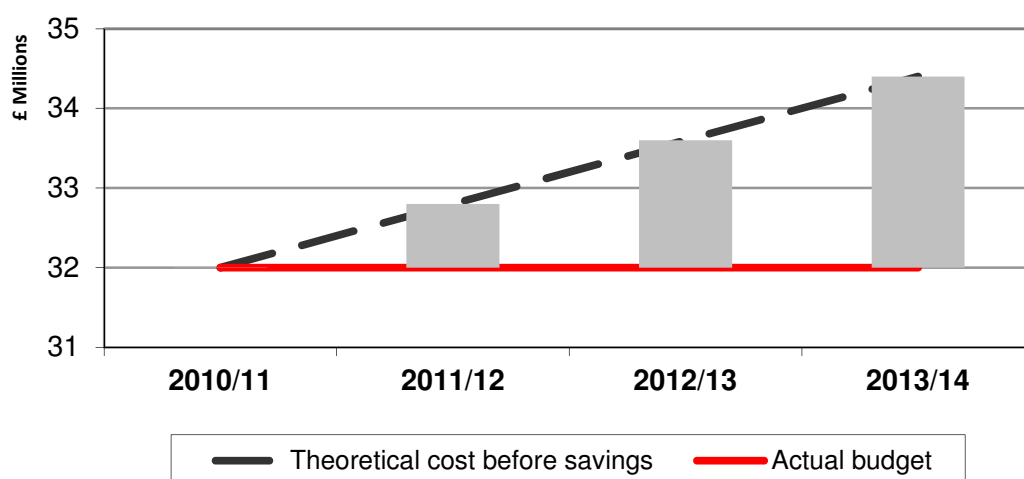
## Finances and Savings

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North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority is financed mainly by contributions from the six unitary authorities in North Wales in proportion to their population. Its annual revenue budget is currently set at £32million.

### Savings made by the Authority

The national economic downturn and the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review in November 2010 gave an indication of the level of cuts to public services that could be expected. Consequently, in December 2010, the Authority took the decision to freeze the annual budget available for running the Service at £32million for the next three years.



What this meant in real terms was that any cost increases that happened during those years (e.g. due to inflation or rises in fuel costs) would have to be paid for from within the existing budget: so every year around £800,000 would need to be taken away from some parts of the Service in order to pay for unavoidable cost increases. In total, by the end of the third year (2013/14), annual savings of £2.45million had to be achieved.

## *Finances and Savings*

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### **How were the savings achieved?**

#### **In 2011/12**

- £200,000 released by taking a very detailed look at specific budget lines and agreeing that what had originally been planned should either be stopped altogether or scaled down.
- £50,000 cut from the Community Fire Safety budget.
- £90,000 cut from the Support Staff budget.
- £460,000 cut from the operational management budget by restructuring the Officer Cover arrangements.
- £30,000 cut from the Control budget by restructuring its staffing arrangements.

#### **In 2012/13**

- Individual budget lines were again cut or scaled down, releasing a further £150,000.
- Another £50,000 cut from the Community Fire Safety budget.
- Another £90,000 cut from the Support Staff budget.
- £500,000 released from the operational firefighters' pay budget by changing the way their shifts were rostered but without reducing the number of firefighters forming an emergency crew.

#### **In 2013/14**

- Individual budget lines were cut or scaled down for a third time, releasing a further £70,000.
- Another £50,000 cut from the Community Fire Safety budget.
- Another £180,000 cut from the Support Staff budget.
- A further £500,000 released from the operational firefighters' pay budget, by changing the way their shifts were rostered (as above).

A major part of the savings involved reducing the workforce, including managers, firefighters, community safety and support staff by an overall 9%. Despite these reductions, the Authority was able to continue to successfully deliver against its objectives.

## *Budget Plans after 2013/14*

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The public sector is facing a very uncertain period of reduced spending. Planning the delivery of fire and rescue services will become increasingly challenging if the money available to run the service does not keep pace with increased costs and the level of demand.

One of the Authority's objectives for 2013/14 was to devise a three-year financial plan for 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17. This was reflected in the public consultation that began in September 2013.

The Authority gave the explanation that since 2010/11, the budget had remained the same, the Service running costs had fallen, and that this had been achieved through what can be termed 'internal' cutbacks, with very few noticeable changes on the outside. For the majority of service users, they will probably not have noticed much difference. However, it considered that the point had now been reached where continuing to freeze the budget would have a noticeable impact on the fire and rescue services provided in North Wales, which the Authority was not minded to pursue.

The Authority proposed to change its approach for the period of its next 3-year budget plan. It made the case for not freezing the budget for another 3 years as to do so would mean reducing the Service's running costs by another £3.3million on top of the £2.45million already taken out over the period of the previous 3-year financial plan.

The Authority explained that the effect of achieving £3.3million of additional savings would be significant. Making that level of saving would involve the closure of 7 retained fire stations, removing one wholetime fire engine from service in Wrexham and removing retained fire appliances from wholetime stations in Holyhead, Caernarfon, Bangor, Llandudno, Colwyn Bay, Rhyl, Deeside and Wrexham.

## *Budget Plans after 2013/14*

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The Authority recognised that all public services are having to limit their spending, and that the fire and rescue service is not immune to the effects of such a harsh financial climate. It was therefore making an undertaking to aim to limit the extent of the budgetary impact on constituent authorities to a maximum equivalent of an additional £1 per year per head of population.

Its intention at the start of the 2013 consultation was that over the next 3 years it would increase the annual budget by just enough to maintain the current level of service, with a safeguard that the level of annual increase should equate to no more than an additional £1 per year per head of population in North Wales.

However, during that period of consultation, the Authority was alerted to the potential effect of the local government finance settlement in Wales in 2014-15 (and specifically on the North Wales unitary authorities that fund North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority), and took the decision in December to:

- a) construct the budget on the basis of the current level of service provision; and
- b) freeze the budget at £32million for a fourth year and move £1million into a general reserve which could be used to cover any overspend which might arise through increased activity. Providing that there is no increase in activity the Authority anticipates that it will be able to manage within the parameters of a frozen budget. However, should there be an increase in activity then general reserves will be available as a fall-back position



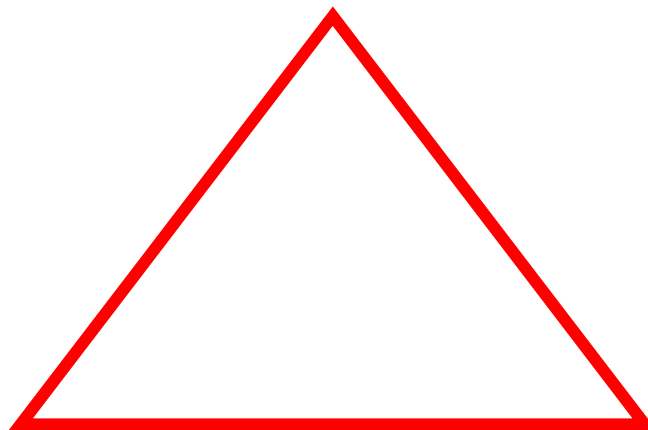
## Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

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The Authority set out its proposals for how it would develop its 2014-15 Improvement Objectives in last year's Improvement Plan, published in March 2013. Through a series of meetings, Members of the Authority considered a range of information to identify the main strategic priorities for the Authority.

The Authority recognised from the findings of this working group that in future it was likely to have to continue to face the same problems as had previously been identified, but with the additional pressure of an anticipated gloomy financial forecast for public services.

**1. An increasing local demand for services**



**2. An increasingly unpredictable rate of demand for services**

**3. Less money available to provide services with**

## Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

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### **1. An increasing local demand for services**

The number of fire injuries in North Wales is gradually decreasing (please refer to previous section on performance and activity) but given the projected demographic changes in North Wales it looks likely that the work of preventing dwelling fires and casualties will increase.

A research project in 2006 into the causes of fire deaths in North Wales revealed that there were 7 factors that in combination contributed to making individuals more vulnerable to becoming victims of fire.

During the 2013 consultation on the 2014/15 Improvement Objectives, it was brought to the Authority's attention that some people – particularly people with disabilities – dislike the use of the term 'vulnerable person' as it could give the wrong impression.

However, this term is used by the Authority as a description of what makes some people a higher priority for support and advice to reduce the chances of their being involved in a dwelling fire. The more contributory factors that apply, the greater their risk of becoming the victim of a dwelling fire unless they take additional measures to counteract those factors. The Authority's prevention strategy is structured around finding ways of removing or countering the effects of as many of the contributory factors as possible, thereby making individuals less vulnerable.

## Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

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The contributory factors that make people statistically more vulnerable were found to be:

- being alone at the time of the fire;
- unusual or particular behaviour, such as smoking in bed, cooking whilst under the influence of alcohol, or hoarding and living in extreme clutter;
- having no working smoke alarm installed in the dwelling;
- being subject to factors normally associated with old age, such as reduced mobility, declining sensory responses and reduced appreciation of physical limitations; or alternatively having the limited appreciation of fire hazards, inappropriate response to a fire situation and a high dependence on adults that the very young would typically have;
- being under the influence of alcohol or some drugs that affect levels of consciousness, speed of reaction and decision making;
- living in rented property;
- having a disability that limits mobility and/or reaction to a fire.

Projections for North Wales indicate that these contributory factors will continue to require a comprehensive fire prevention strategy in the area. Specifically:

- the number of households looks set to continue to increase, with a higher proportion of those households occupied by only one person. This increases the likelihood of being alone when a fire occurs, and increases the demand for smoke alarms.
- more people are living longer, but associated with that is a projection that more people will be living with dementia, and more people will be being cared for in their own homes.
- the number of children is projected to rise in the medium term, before falling slightly in the longer term.
- the incidence of smoking and alcohol and drug misuse remain relatively high in Wales.

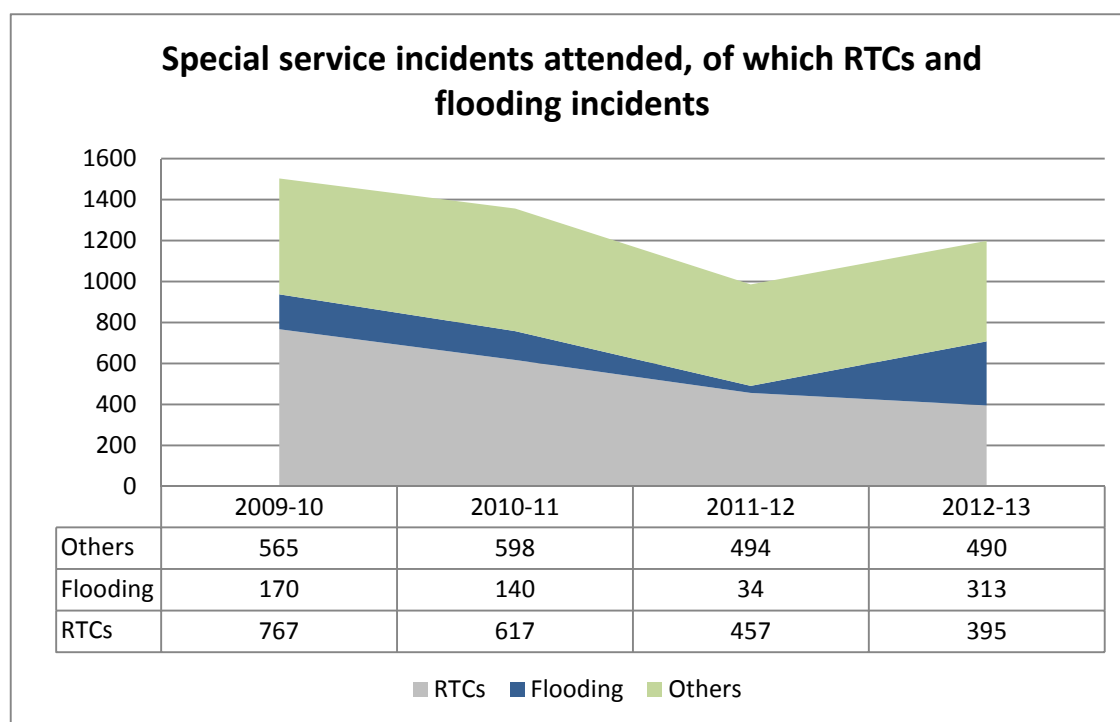
## Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

### 2. The unpredictability of incidents

The number of special service incidents (that is, non-fire emergencies) attended can vary considerably from year to year – this has been particularly evident in the number of flooding incidents attended.

The impact on the service is that it has to ensure that it has sufficient resources available to cope with large variations in levels of demand whilst maintaining cover throughout the region.

This relates to both the number of simultaneous incidents and the duration of incidents that can tie up resources for long periods of time.



## Specific problems that the Authority is seeking to tackle

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### **3. Less money available to provide services with**

The indications are that public spending in Wales is likely to be placed under increasing pressure over the next few years.

A recent study by the Institute for Fiscal Studies<sup>1</sup> predicts that further cuts of 5% in real terms will be required by 2017-18, but if decisions were taken by Welsh Government to protect some areas (specifically health services, schools and social services), the cuts to unprotected areas would have to increase to an average 13%.

Please refer also to the section on Finances and Savings in this document for details of the possible impact of further cuts to this Authority's budget.

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<sup>1</sup> *Institute of Fiscal Studies (2013) Scenarios for the Welsh Government budget to 2025-26*  
IFS, London

## Public consultation – your views

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The Authority ran its public consultation on its draft Improvement Objectives 2014/15 between September 16th and December 9th 2013.

Eight written responses were received, which reflected broad agreement with what the Authority was proposing. Some respondents also 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.

A report on the response was considered by the Authority's Executive Panel in February 2014 – this is available from the Fire Authority meetings section of the [www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk](http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk) website.

### **Improvement Objective 1**

**To help to keep people and communities safe by preventing deaths and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation.**

#### **Why has this objective been chosen?**

Because keeping people safe is at the heart of what the Authority does. The safety of people in North Wales is its primary concern, but also it makes much better sense to prevent incidents from happening than to simply react every time they do.

The Authority is committed to retaining its annual target of delivering 30,000 Home Fire Safety Checks to householders in North Wales, but the demographics of North Wales and the identified behaviours mean that prevention activity may need to increase in order to keep pace, and that response services will need to remain available to deal with failures and the unexpected or genuinely unpreventable accidents. For many years the Authority has been reminding people that prevention is better than cure, and it still believes that.

Furthermore, the Authority is very clearly mandated to work in this direction - the Welsh Government's Programme for Wales sets out its own commitment to improving community safety, which is reflected in its Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012 Onwards.

#### **What is the expected outcome?**

People expect to be safe in their homes. With the right support and advice, people can protect themselves from accidental fires, both by preventing a fire from starting in the first instance, and by knowing how to react quickly and correctly if one does occur.

Where that has failed, people should have confidence that the fire and rescue service will respond quickly and effectively to rescue them and limit the damage to their property.

## The Authority's Improvement Objectives for 2014/15

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### **What new actions are planned for 2014-15?**

1. Continuing to seek more partner organisations able to help deliver Home Fire Safety Checks in North Wales. Aim to deliver 30,000 such checks, with a minimum of 30% made following a referral from a partner agency.
2. Supporting and promoting the provision of linked smoke detectors in dwellings that have resident remote monitoring care systems in place.

### **What specifically will be reported back to the public after the end of the year?**

#### Outputs

- The number of home fire safety checks delivered, with a target of 30,000 during the year.
- The percentage of home fire safety checks delivered as a result of a referral from a partner agency, with a minimum target of 30% of the overall number delivered.

#### Outcomes

- The number of deaths arising from accidental dwelling fires compared with previous years and in other areas.
- The number of injuries (especially in the more serious categories) sustained at accidental dwelling fires compared with previous years and in other areas.
- The percentage of people involved in accidental dwelling fires who were able to escape unharmed without needing assistance from a fire crew to do so compared with previous years.



### **Improvement Objective 2**

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.

#### **Why has this objective been chosen?**

The Authority's annual budget has stayed the same since 2010/11, which has meant lowering the Service's annual running costs by £2.45million. This has been achieved mainly through 'internal' cutbacks that were largely imperceptible to service users.

This objective seeks to balance the need to maintain the current level of service but also acknowledges the forecast financial pressures on the 6 unitary authorities in North Wales that fund the majority of the Authority's operations. In 2014/15, this means freezing the budget for a fourth year and moving £1million into a general reserve which could be used to cover any overspend which might arise through increased activity.

#### **What is the expected outcome?**

Maintenance of the current level of service, and providing that there is no increase in activity the Authority anticipates that it will be able to manage within the parameters of a frozen budget. However, should there be an increase in activity then general reserves will be available as a fall-back position.

## The Authority's Improvement Objectives for 2014/15

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### **What new actions are planned for 2014-15?**

1. Workforce planning including forecasting of demand and supply.
2. A review of the turnover profile of the operational workforce to identify strategies for reducing cost.
3. Focusing on minimising budgetary increases and continuing to identify efficiencies within the Service.
4. Finding ways of identifying the financial impact of different methods of providing fire cover in rural areas.

### **What specifically will be reported back to the public after the end of the year?**

Budget reports and financial information presented to the Authority.

### **Improvement Objective 3**

**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**

#### **Why has this objective been chosen?**

In its public consultation in 2012, the Authority explained some of the difficulties of providing fire and rescue services in predominantly rural areas. In North Wales, the majority of fire stations are crewed exclusively by firefighters working the Retained Duty System (RDS), where crew members are paid an annual retainer and fees for attending incidents.

The vast majority of RDS staff are genuinely committed to the work, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract and retain staff who are able to both provide fire cover and hold down a full time job with their primary employer. This duty system suited previous generations very well as people generally stayed within their communities without travelling far for either work or leisure, and companies could afford to employ large numbers of staff. Now, however, primary employers are under pressure to operate with as few employees as possible, making it less likely that they can afford to allow their staff to leave their place of work to attend an emergency incident for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Members of the Service have been looking at different ways of providing fire and rescue services, and have visited a number of Fire and Rescue Services in other parts of the UK to see what alternatives are in operation elsewhere. The reports coming back have been mixed, with several new alternatives being simply too new to gauge the full implications of adopting them.

Taking the long term sustainability and affordability of services as guiding principles, the Authority proposes that this work of finding suitable alternative options for providing fire and rescue services in North Wales should continue to develop.

## The Authority's Improvement Objectives for 2014/15

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### **What is the expected outcome?**

Sustainable and affordable fire and rescue service provision that can continue to cope with fluctuating and unpredictable levels of demand.

### **What new actions are planned for 2014-15?**

1. The introduction of a new recruitment strategy for operational personnel that uses flexible contracts.
2. A review of the resilience requirements for 24-hour shift and day crewed fire stations to ensure that medium term sickness absence has a minimal impact on crewing levels.
3. Seeking to improve the availability strategy for operational crews.
4. A review of specialist rescues, equipment and associated training provided by the Service to ensure that there is no overprovision in the area, and, working with partners, explore the possibility of alternative providers.
5. Further improvement of the Service's use of technology to manage availability of stations, potentially expanding this to include all operational duty systems within a single availability system.
6. Exploration of the possibility of providing a system of Contingency Crews that would support the Service when required for particular challenging circumstances such as times of high demand (spate conditions) or a depleted workforce.

### **What specifically will be reported back to the public after the end of the year?**

Evaluation of the new flexible contracts and reports of progress against the actions listed above.

## Appendix

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This appendix contains additional background information about the Authority, the duty to continuously improve, and other general information.

### **NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**Its role** is to perform all the duties and responsibilities of a Fire Authority in accordance with appropriate legislation and regulations, approve its Improvement and Risk Reduction Plans, approve its revenue and capital budgets and the contribution for the constituent councils, monitor the revenue and capital budgets and deal with any significant variations, including decisions on any revised or supplementary contributions.

The Authority's **Executive Panel** consists of 14 voting members, namely the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority and two members selected from among the members of each of the six constituent Authorities.

The Authority's **Audit Committee** consists of the 14 voting members who are not on the Executive Panel. This committee has its own Chair and Deputy Chair.

The Authority's **Standards Committee** consist of 4 independent members and 2 members of the Authority.

The **Clerk and Monitoring Officer's** role is to ensure meetings are administered in accordance with relevant legislation and regulation, to deal with code of conduct issues, overall governance and democratic arrangements and legal and procedural matters.

The **Treasurer's** role is to provide financial advice relating to revenue and capital funding issues, investment and cashflow, to keep proper accounting records and take reasonable steps to prevent and detect fraud or financial irregularities. He is responsible for the preparation of the Authority's Statement of Accounts in accordance with proper practices to give a true and fair view of the Authority's financial position and income and expenditure.

The North Wales Fire Services 1995 Combination Scheme Order established the Authority (replacing the former Gwynedd and Clwyd Fire Brigades), made provision for the control and administration of its finances, and defined the area it would cover.

In setting its budget for the following financial year, the Authority is required to submit an estimate of its net expenses to each constituent authority before the end of December, and subsequently, before 15<sup>th</sup> February, give notice of the actual amount of contribution to be paid by that authority in the next financial year.

Detailed information on the role of the Fire and Rescue Authority and the general guidelines which apply are set out in Standing Orders (available on the website at [www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk](http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk) or on request).

The Authority's specific duties and powers are prescribed in a range of legislation and regulations, but the key ones are:

**The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004** that specifies a Fire and Rescue Authority's core duties as:

- **Promoting fire safety in its area.** This includes making the necessary arrangements for:
  - Providing information, publicity and encouragement to people about how to prevent fires and avoid becoming a casualty of fire.
  - Giving advice (on request) about how to prevent fires and restrict their spread in buildings and other property; the means of escape from buildings and other property in case of fire.
- **Dealing with calls for help.** This includes obtaining the necessary information and summoning the personnel to deal with incidents of fire, road traffic accidents and other defined emergencies.
- **Fighting fires in its area.** This includes providing the personnel (and their training), services and equipment to meet the normal requirements of extinguishing fires and protecting life and property in the event of fires.
- **Rescuing people from road traffic accidents in its area.** This includes providing the personnel (and their training), services and equipment to meet the normal requirements of protecting people from serious harm (to the extent that it considers it reasonable) in road traffic accidents.

- **Dealing with other emergencies.** The nature, extent and geographical area of this requirement would be set out by government and may require or authorise the Authority to secure the provision of the personnel (and their training), services and equipment to deal with emergencies other than fires and road traffic accidents.
- **Responding to other eventualities.** The Authority may take any action it considers appropriate in relation to an event or situation that might cause harm to people or the environment, including the life and health of plants and animals.

**The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005** that confers powers and places duties on a Fire and Rescue Authority as an enforcing authority for the purpose of inspecting and enforcing fire safety in relevant premises in its area.

**The Civil Contingencies Act 2004** that defines the powers and duties of specified categories of local bodies to prepare contingency plans for, and respond to emergency events or situations that threaten serious damage to human welfare or the environment, and war or terrorism that threatens serious damage to the security of the United Kingdom.

## MAKING IMPROVEMENTS AND REDUCING RISK

The **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009** came into effect from April 2010. It requires Welsh Improvement Authorities (county councils, national parks authorities and fire and rescue authorities) to set improvement objectives and make arrangements to achieve them.

Improvement objectives can be anything that can be shown to improve what the Welsh Improvement Authority does (its 'functions') in terms of at least one out of seven aspects of improvement, namely:

1. strategic effectiveness;
2. service quality;
3. service availability;
4. fairness;
5. sustainability;
6. efficiency; and
7. innovation.

Fire and Rescue Authorities, as Welsh Improvement Authorities, have been issued with their own specific guidance relating to Part 1 of the Measure concerned with improvement.

Their operations will be subject to an Improvement Assessment by the Auditor General for Wales (operating through the Wales Audit Office) that is undertaken through a forward-looking Corporate Assessment and a retrospective Performance Assessment in each financial year.

A copy of the guidance document is available from the Welsh Government's website <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/publications/?lang=en>.



## Continuously Striving for Improvement

The role of the Fire and Rescue Authority is defined in a range of laws and regulations but the Authority has always sought to improve and enhance the services it provides and to do more than simply meet minimum requirements.

The Authority is committed to enhancing people's lives in a number of different ways. These include playing a part in making sure that:

- citizens, workers and visitors are protected so that they can live long and healthy lives;
- whole communities are protected so that people can lead fulfilled lives;
- the area's culture, heritage and language are protected so that people can lead enriched lives;
- cities, towns and villages are protected so that they can be economically and socially vibrant places for people to live, work and visit;
- the countryside and coastlines are protected so that they can continue to provide natural habitats and be rewarding places for people to live, work and visit;
- individual homes are protected, so that people have access to good, safe, housing;
- public buildings are protected so that people can feel safe when they conduct business there;
- workplaces are protected so that people can feel safe when they work there;
- transport networks are protected so that people and goods can pass between places freely and safely;
- the environment and the world's resources are protected so that we leave the world a better place.

Furthermore, the Authority is fully committed to ensuring that:

- it does not waste the money and other resources entrusted to it;
- it supports its employees to achieve their full potential and share their knowledge and skills with others.

## Arrangements to secure continuous improvement

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority has made specific arrangements to support the achievement of its improvement and risk reduction strategies.

### Governance Arrangements

The Authority itself is organised in such a way that its 28 elected members can maintain a proper involvement in strategic planning, in decision-making and in monitoring the service's levels of performance. The full Authority meets regularly, at least four times per year, with more frequent meetings of the Executive Panel between times. It has an Audit Committee and a separate Standards Committee that meet to consider specific issues. The Authority's correct functioning is further supported by its Clerk and Treasurer. Meetings are open to the public, and records of the Authority's transactions are available from the Authority's website.

The Service is led and managed by the Chief Fire Officer supported by the principal officer team, the senior management team, specialist advisers, and a defined organisational structure.

The Service's structure is aligned to the six North Wales local authority areas, and works in partnership through specific collaborative arrangements with a wide range of organisations including other emergency services, members of the local resilience forum, health, education and voluntary sectors, specific agencies and commissions and local service boards. Where appropriate, formal agreements are entered into for the sharing of data.

Progress against specific departmental and project plans, annual service plans and detailed budget plans is monitored and reported regularly throughout the year, with in-year adjustments to plans being agreed where necessary.

Separate assurance processes are provided through internal and external audits, including financial audits.

## Arrangements to secure continuous improvement

### Collaboration

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority supports collaboration with other fire and rescue services in a range of improvement activities, pooling expertise and sharing resources (e.g. joint procurement of equipment, joint recruitment of wholetime firefighters) where appropriate, at both UK and Wales levels.

### National Issues Committee (NIC)

The Welsh Fire and Rescue Services' National Issues Committee (NIC) was established in 2012 to further improve collaborative working, service delivery and sustained service improvement.

The Key Collaborative Areas of the NIC are:

1. National Control Arrangements
2. Effective Resilience Plans for Large-Scale Emergencies
3. National Collaborative Procurement
4. National Training and Development Functions
5. National Human Resources Functions
6. Common and Specialist Services, including ICT and Transport

### Other Collaboration

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority also supports collaboration with a range of partner organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors. This includes collaboration for the purposes of:

- realising its own aims and objectives
- local and national resilience, and
- supporting multi-agency improvement through Single Integrated Plans.

## General Statement

The Local Government Measure 2009 introduced a general duty for Welsh Improvement Authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of their functions. Whilst there could never be an absolute duty to improve, there is an expectation that authorities will make suitable arrangements to improve and set themselves realistic, relevant and sufficiently ambitious objectives.

Authorities are required to make a general statement outlining the nature of their intentions for discharging the general duty to improve.

In accordance with this legislation, North Wales Fire and Rescue develops and publishes an annual improvement and risk reduction plan upon which it has consulted. This plan is published as soon as possible after 31 December in the year prior to the financial year to which it relates, and itemises the improvement objectives and associated measures of success for the forthcoming financial year.

Once agreement has been reached about the level of funding that the authority will have available (by mid February prior to the start of the financial year), budgets are allocated to specific purposes. This includes revenue spending and the roll-out of the capital programme.

Departmental plans showing how the high level objectives will be achieved (with associated quantitative targets where appropriate) are developed by the end of March.

Central monitoring by senior management of spending and the completion of planned objectives takes place at quarterly meetings through the year, so that any in-year adjustments can be made if necessary. Progress reports are provided to the Authority throughout the year. External assessment of progress is provided by Wales Audit Office.

A summary of the achievement of objectives is provided through the following year's Performance Assessment, published by 31 October in relation to the previous financial year, and through the Treasurer's report to the Fire and Rescue Authority.

## OTHER INFORMATION

### CONTACT DETAILS

Postal address: North Wales Fire and Rescue  
Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters  
Ffordd Salesbury  
St Asaph Business Park  
St Asaph  
Denbighshire  
LL17 0JJ

Telephone: 01745 535250

Website: [www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk](http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk)

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- The **Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004** came into effect in October 2004, replacing the previous Fire and Rescue Services Act 1947 in England and Wales.  
It clarifies the duties and powers of Fire and Rescue Authorities to:
  - Promote fire safety
  - Fight fires
  - Protect people and property from fires
  - Rescue people from road traffic accidents
  - Respond to other specified risks, such as chemical incidents
  - Respond to large scale emergencies such as terrorist attacks
- The **National Framework 2012 Onwards** was issued by the Welsh Government under section 21 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. It sets out the Welsh Government's vision and priorities for the three Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales and what is expected of them during the lifespan of the framework.
- The **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009** came into effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. It created a statutory regime that integrates shorter term local service improvement and long term community planning. Specific guidance relating to the improvement element (Part 1) for fire and rescue services was issued by the Welsh Government in May 2010.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- The **Fire and Rescue Authorities (Improvement Plans) (Wales) Order 2012** came into force on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2012. It requires fire and rescue authorities to publish their improvement plan as soon as reasonably practicable after 31 December in the year prior to the financial year to which the improvement plan relates.
- **Previous year's Performance** - Section 15 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 places a duty on Fire and Rescue Authorities to publish performance information relating to each financial year, by 31 October, in the year following that to which the performance relates. The Authority's assessment of its performance in 2011-12 is available from the Performance and Improvement Section of its website – [www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk](http://www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk).
- The **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005** came into effect in October 2006, replacing over 70 pieces of fire safety law. It applies to all non-domestic premises in England and Wales, including the communal parts of blocks of flats and houses in multiple occupation. It abolished the requirement for businesses to have fire certificates and put the onus on the person responsible for the premises to address fire safety in those premises.
- The **Equality Act 2010** replaced over 100 pieces of equality law. The General Duty and specific duties for the public sector in Wales came into force in April 2011.
- The **Civil Contingencies Act 2004** provides a single framework for civil protection to large scale emergencies that threaten serious damage to human welfare, the environment or to security. Fire and Rescue Services are 'Category 1' responders under this act.
- **Welsh Government Fire Branch**  
The responsibility for providing fire and rescue services and promoting fire safety in Wales was devolved to the National Assembly for Wales on 10 November 2004. The Community Safety division of the Welsh Assembly Government is based at Rhydycar, Merthyr Tydfil CF48 1UZ. <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/?lang=en>

- **Wales Audit Office**

The Wales Audit Office publishes reports on behalf of the Auditor General who is required to assess the likelihood that the Authority will continue to improve and whether the Authority is discharging its duties and acting in accordance with relevant issued guidance. Auditors also work with fire authorities across Wales to deliver a programme of financial and value-for-money audits.

<http://www.wao.gov.uk/>

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## INTERVENTION IN THE EVENT OF FAILURE OR POTENTIAL FAILURE TO COMPLY

The Welsh Government has powers of intervention:

- under section 22 of the **Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004** if it considers that a Fire and Rescue Authority is failing, or is likely to fail, to act in accordance with the National Framework. In such cases, section 23 - Intervention Protocol would apply.
- under section 29 of the **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009** if it considers that a Fire and Rescue Authority is failing, or is at risk of failing, to comply with the Measure. However, in all but the most exceptional circumstances, Welsh Ministers may only intervene after they have offered voluntary support to the Authority under section 28 of the Measure.

## CONSULTATIONS

	Consultation	Publication	For year
Full Risk Reduction Plan	Summer 2006	October 2006	2007-08 onwards
Annual Action Plan	Summer 2007	October 2007	2008-09
Annual Action Plan	Summer 2008	October 2008	2009-10
Annual Action Plan	Summer 2008	October 2009	2010-11
Full Risk Reduction Plan	Summer 2009		
Full Risk Reduction and Improvement Plan	Summer 2010	October 2010	2011-12
Improvement Objectives	Summer 2011	October 2011	2012-13
Improvement Objectives	Autumn 2012	March 2013	2013-14
Improvement Objectives	Autumn 2013	March 2014	2014-15

## HOW TO CONTRIBUTE TO FUTURE IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

Sections 5 and 6 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 require the Authority to consult widely before coming to final decisions about improvement.

The Authority conducts a public consultation each year when it publicises its proposed improvement and risk reduction objectives for the following year and invites comments from anyone with an interest in what the Authority does. All comments received are taken into account before finalising the following year's plans.

Anyone wishing to contribute new ideas about future improvement objectives should write to the Deputy Chief Fire Officer at the Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Ffordd Salesbury, St. Asaph Business Park, St. Asaph, Denbighshire LL17 0JJ.