

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

DATE:	31 <sup>st</sup> January 2005
REPORT BY:	<b>CHIEF FIRE OFFICER</b>
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To make recommendations to members on the future of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service control

1. **BACKGROUND**

1.1 In taking forward the modernisation agenda for the fire and rescue service both the UK and Welsh Assembly Governments have placed great importance on the future of mobilising control rooms. In England, following two reports into the issue by consultants Mott Macdonald, the Government has developed, and is currently implementing, the FiReControl (sic) project involving the removal of the existing 46 fire and rescue service controls and their replacement with 9 (including London) regional controls which together will form part of a new, improved resilience structure. Scotland is the subject of a separate consultant's report which also advocated a reduction of fire controls and is currently being considered by the Minister with responsibility for fire. The Mott Macdonald report, in regard to Wales, recommended one "regional" control for the whole of the Principality (see paragraph 2.1).

1.2 In Wales the position of the Assembly in respect of both the Mott Macdonald report and the wider issue of control rooms is stated in paragraph 3.6 of the "near final" version of the National Framework document, which states:-

*'Since publication of the Mott MacDonald report, the conclusion that Wales should have a single control room as part of an integrated set of regional control rooms is now a matter for the National Assembly for Wales. The Assembly believes that the Welsh context is different from that of England. Following reorganisation in 1996, which saw the previous eight fire authorities reduce to the existing three, the case for further amalgamation has not been made and further consideration on our plans for the next five years and beyond is needed. However we want the fire and rescue service to consider longer-term partnership and collaborative working arrangements that enhance operational effectiveness. This should include considering opportunities for joint working with the other emergency services where it makes clear sense in terms of operational effectiveness and best value for all concerned.'*

1.3 Paragraph 3.7 of the Framework describes Assembly support for joint working and premises-sharing arrangements in Mid and West Wales between the three primary emergency services. These two paragraphs indicate a strong desire on the part of the Welsh Assembly Government for the emergency services in Wales to work together on collaborative ventures.

1. **BACKGROUND** *(continued)*

- 1.4 The Authority, through its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP), has already committed itself to an examination of the potential for a joint emergency services control room in North Wales (page 20, section 2 of "The Issues" refers).

2. **INFORMATION**

- 2.1 The absence of prescriptive central guidance on the future of fire and rescue service controls in Wales (unlike, say, the FiReControl project in England), presents the Authority with opportunity to shape its own future rather than have one imposed on it. The Mott Macdonald report, which led to the plan for 9 regional controls in England, also recommended, without any significant evidence to back it up, one "regional" fire control for Wales. It is the Assembly's view that this case "has not been made". It is the view of the Chief Fire Officer that, on a professional/operational basis, the creation of a single fire control for Wales would be potentially detrimental to the level of service currently provided, particularly in respect of North Wales, where significant cultural and language issues exist in addition to more generic operational considerations.
- 2.2 It is, however, clear that, for reasons outlined in the IRMP document and deliberated at length by the Executive Panel's IRMP working group, there are significant operational advantages when emergency services share the same control environment. Mobilising decisions can be made more quickly as there is no reliance on one service informing another of an incident in progress by telephone – a factor which gives rise to operational tensions at present. Additionally, given the enhanced rescue role conferred on the fire and rescue service by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the added responsibilities placed on all of the emergency services following the New Dimension of terrorism post September 2001, there is a pressing and fundamental requirement to ensure that the management of large, protracted and complex incidents is as effective as possible. Provided that the correct environmental and operational protocols are in place, the potential for a significantly improved response to the public across all three emergency services can only be enhanced by a joint control arrangement.
- 2.3 As a result of the IRMP commitment to explore the potential for a shared control room in North Wales with the other primary emergency services, preliminary discussions have taken place between the Chief Fire Officer, the Chief Constable and the Chief Executive of the Wales Ambulance Trust. These discussions have resulted in a mutually agreed commitment to the principle of a shared control facility based on a number of shared principles that, if the proposals receive political support in each of the three emergency services, will be converted into a three way protocol. These principles include a shared view on the need for no internal physical barriers between services in a joint facility and a mutually agreed opposition to the concept of "multitasking" (i.e. a single operator receiving calls for any of the three services).

2. **INFORMATION** *(continued)*

- 2.4 A short project undertaken by fire and rescue service officers at the request of the Chief Fire Officer has indicated the feasibility, at a practical level, of relocating the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service control into a shared facility with a minimum of disruption. It is possible merely to “lift and shift” the existing equipment into the new facility. There would, naturally, be other issues that would need to be resolved and the project has successfully identified them following extensive research in other fire and rescue services where joint working initiatives have been introduced. This work has been valuable in not only establishing the feasibility of such a move, but learning from the mistakes made in other services and integrating those learning points into future work.

3. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3.1 That the Panel notes the work that has been done to date in establishing the feasibility of sharing a joint control facility with both the ambulance service and the police in North Wales.
- 3.2 That the Panel notes the commitment in the National Framework document for Wales for the emergency services to explore collaborative ventures where they deliver operational benefits and represent best value for everyone concerned.
- 3.3 That the Chief Fire Officer now takes part in a fully managed project, with the police and ambulance services, to develop the existing expressions of commitment into concrete proposals for co- location of the three emergency service controls, reporting regularly to the Executive Panel on progress.
- 3.4 That the Chairman of the Fire and Rescue authority should represent the authority at political level within the project management arrangements.