

FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES IN NORTH WALES

– PUBLIC CONSULTATION

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this North Wales Fire and Rescue public consultation.

This year we have identified four specific risk topics for consultation prior to finalising our Risk Reduction Plan. All four topics have been chosen because they could potentially affect the Authority's ability to provide high quality fire and rescue services in the medium to long term.

The first three are matters of degree that focus on the extent to which the Authority should progress in certain directions. The fourth is a matter of approach, and how, in an extremely challenging financial climate, the Authority can safeguard its own position whilst continuing to play its role in the context of the wider public sector.

Risks are managed by members and officers as a normal part of the running of the service, but these four issues are important matters of long term direction that belong within the risk reduction planning process.

If agreed, detailed action plans will be developed to take these projects forward over the next few years.

Taking on board some of the comments we received in past consultations, we have tried to describe each topic clearly, giving you enough information to form a view without swamping you with too much detail.

For those who like more information and underpinning statistics, we have included at the back of this document some sources of additional information.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

We would like you to read this booklet, ask us about the issues if you like, and then let us know what you think **by September 4th 2009**. Details of how to respond are given on page 30.

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THIS YEAR'S BIG RISK REDUCTION PLANNING TOPICS

The four topics covered in this consultation are:

RRP 1 – WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

We consider the degree to which we can continue to expand our contribution to developing tomorrow's good citizens.

RRP 2 – THE RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM

We face up to the future problems of continuing to support a work system that was devised at a time when people lived very different lives.

RRP 3 – CO-RESPONDING

We reflect on the benefits and barriers to taking on the role of attending life threatening medical emergencies at the request of the ambulance service.

RRP 4 - EFFICIENCIES

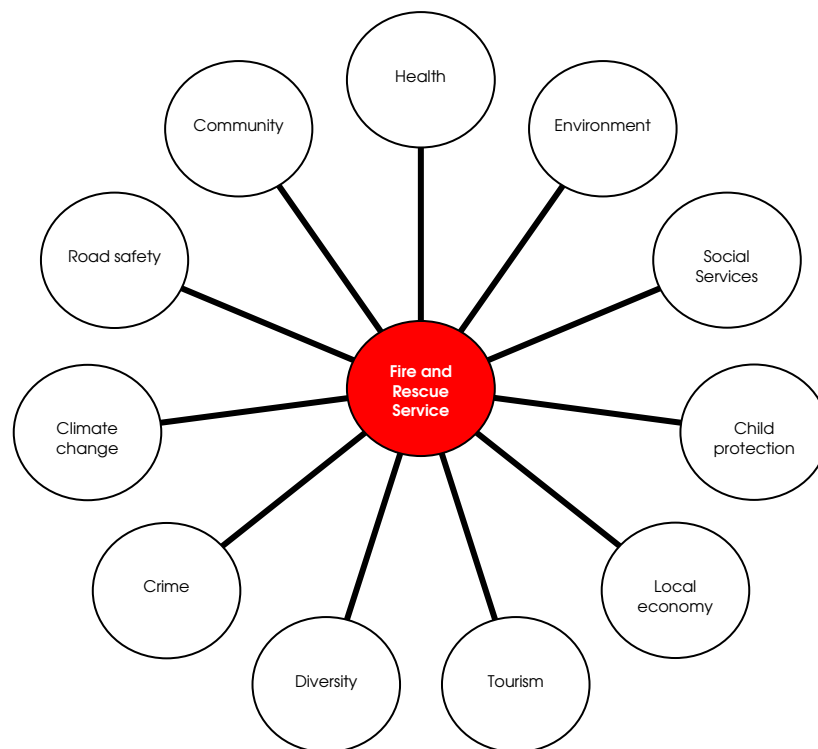
At a time when the whole public sector is tightening its belt, we consider the authority's strategy for delivering affordable services on a limited budget.

THIS IS A PUBLIC SERVICE - YOUR VIEWS MATTER

Your views as members of the public do matter because running today's fire and rescue service is about more than just responding to emergencies.

In Wales there is a particular emphasis on public services working together effectively to support and build strong communities– so more people than just those who have had fires will be interested in what the fire and rescue service does.

(Insert diagram illustrating links with other public sector policy areas. Example...)



We take the view that our success is enhanced when the people who rely on the fire and rescue service are involved in shaping the services it provides.

The more people we can get involved, the better our prospects of achieving the right balance.

TOO TECHNICAL FOR NON-PROFESSIONALS?

No, not at all. The questions we are asking as part of this consultation are more to do with the strategic direction of the service as a whole than with technical service matters.

Inevitably, big decisions about the service will eventually come down to affordability – so we really do want to know what you expect to receive for your money, which aspects of the service you think could be expanded, and how improvements to the service should be paid for.

Thus, when we come to apply technical and professional expertise to developing detailed action plans for the Service, we can have confidence that they will deliver what the people of North Wales expect.

MUST DO'S AND MIGHT DO'S

Today's fire and rescue service delivers a far more sophisticated range of services than just responding to emergencies.

As you might expect, there are some things that fire and rescue authorities are legally bound to do, but there are many things that fire and rescue authorities can decide for themselves to do as circumstances allow. We could call these the 'must do's' and the 'might do's'.

For example, prior to a change of law in 2004, fire authorities had no absolute duty to attend road crashes unless there was a fire. However, most chose to do so, convinced by the wider benefit that came from spending the firefighting budget on training and equipping firefighters to free victims from the wreckage of cars. It wasn't until the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 had been introduced that rescuing people from car crashes became a statutory duty - a 'must do' - for fire authorities.

The current laws allow government to direct fire and rescue authorities to undertake certain types of activities, but there is still an element of discretion that rests with each fire and rescue authority.

The risks associated with introducing some of the 'might do's' whilst improving the 'must do's' in a difficult economic climate is the main thrust of this year's consultation.

RRP TOPIC 1 – WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

The fire and rescue service doesn't just react to emergencies – it helps to build communities.

We are very proud of the work we do with young people, and the way we have been successfully contributing to supporting good citizenship for a number of years. Fire and rescue service personnel are held in high regard, and connect well with young people.

The majority of our youth work falls outside the category of 'must do's', which is why we have identified it as a risk reduction plan topic.

We know there is a huge benefit to expanding our work with young people, but we also recognise that we cannot do so to the extent that it starts to jeopardise our core activities. This is why we have included it in our Risk Reduction Plan - we have to consider very carefully the implications of increasing our involvement in this field.

Encouraging good citizenship and keeping young people safe on the roads does reduce the number of incidents the fire and rescue service has to respond to, but it also contributes to social policies such as education, health and wellbeing and to economic policies such as business and tourism.

NOTE regarding Community Fire Safety Education

The service employs qualified teachers to deliver a comprehensive programme of between four hundred and five hundred educational visits to schools in North Wales every year to promote fire safety amongst primary and secondary school-age children.

Unlike the other initiatives described in this section, this work falls more directly under the statutory duty to promote fire safety, and is therefore a core function of the authority and does not form part of this consultation.

EXAMPLES OF HOW NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE HELPS YOUNG PEOPLE BECOME BETTER CITIZENS

Our youth programmes are not about recruiting people into the fire and rescue service, and do not directly form part of the authority's statutory core function of promoting fire safety.

These initiatives are designed to help make better citizens who do not then create situations that call for fire and rescue service intervention such as deliberate fires or reckless driving. All in all, prevention costs less than punishment, but also those people who lead chaotic or risky lifestyles are more likely to fall victim to accidental fires, so on both counts prevention makes good sense.

Phoenix Projects

Phoenix Projects are run for the primary purpose of addressing antisocial behaviour amongst young people. Phoenix courses bring in young people to spend up to five days with fire and rescue service staff taking part in special team-building and confidence-boosting activities and learning a little about the Service itself. These courses instil community values by helping the participants to become more motivated and positive about themselves, which in turn has the effect of making them better citizens.

What makes Phoenix Projects different from the other excellent work done with young people by schools and other agencies is that they get a very different reaction from participants who might have become disillusioned by their life experiences. Youngsters who might not belong to any teams or clubs or take part in organised events are given the opportunity to get involved in structured activities in a disciplined and supportive environment. Experience has shown that after being part of these projects, the majority of participants engage back into education and go on to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

The Welsh Assembly Government has given £177,600 to the Authority to help meet the cost of employing a Youth Worker and running Phoenix projects in North Wales in 2009-10. However, as there is no guarantee that we will receive external funding in future years, we have to consider how we would manage without it.

Fire Awareness Child Education (FACE)

FACE is a specialist scheme aimed at children up to the age of 11 who may have already exhibited, or be at risk of developing, a dangerous fascination for fire. Referrals onto the programme may be based on past experience of experimenting with fire, or on professional advice as a way of redirecting an individual child's behavioural profile. The programme, which has been adopted by many fire and rescue services, aims to involve both the child and his or her family in a tailored programme of education about the dangers of playing with matches or deliberately setting fires.

Fire Safe

Fire Safe is a relatively recent initiative in North Wales, and an extension of the FACE programme to older children and young people of between 12 and 17 years of age who may be exhibiting an unhealthy and inappropriate fascination for fires. Each one is run over 10 sessions focused on promoting attitude and behaviour change and encouraging the young person to adopt a more positive stance through understanding the destructive effects of fire setting.

Young Firefighters Association (YFA)

This well-established association is run by fire and rescue services throughout the UK. Branches are run by fire and rescue service employees and volunteers, giving young people aged between 11 and 17 the opportunity to get involved in activities and projects in a fire and rescue service setting, helping them to develop discipline, leadership qualities, social conscience and community awareness. In North Wales we are now seeing past members returning as leaders to the next generation of YFA members.

Youth Charities

We are also considering the extent to which we can increase our support for a range of youth charities such as:

The **Prince's Trust** that helps 14 to 30-year-olds who have struggled at school, been in care, are long-term unemployed or have been in trouble with the law.

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The **Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme** that is dedicated to the personal development of young people aged between 14 and 24 years into fully rounded and responsible people.

Consultation Question

If external funding for youth work were to be withdrawn, should the Authority discontinue its youth activities, or should it redirect resources from its other – possibly front line - services so that it can continue with this work?

RRP TOPIC 2 – RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM (RDS) COVER FOR TOMORROW

How the RDS system works

The Retained Duty System (RDS) is a long-established system of employing firefighters in areas where the number of emergencies is comparatively low.

The majority of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service employees are RDS personnel – men and women who are trained as firefighters to deal with the same range of situations and incidents as their wholetime colleagues, and who commit to being 'on call' for up to 120 hours per week to respond to emergencies.

Retained Duty System (RDS) personnel are a vital part of the fire and rescue service in North Wales, providing professional, cost-effective services at the heart of our local communities.

Many RDS personnel have full or part time jobs in a range of occupations, but when their fire and rescue service alerter sounds they have a maximum of 5 minutes to report to their local fire station ready to form part of the team on the fire engine.

How RDS personnel are paid

RDS personnel who commit to the maximum 120 hours per week are paid:

- an annual retainer of approximately 10% of the annual basic pay of their equivalent on the wholetime duty system;
- the same hourly rate of pay as their equivalent on the wholetime duty system;
- a standard fee plus a minimum of half an hour's pay for each time they report to the fire station in response to their alerter.

RDS personnel also attend their local fire station once a week for three hours for training and from time to time they provide standby cover or attend incidents beyond the vicinity of their own fire station. They also attend external training courses as required.

Regardless of the actual number of 'on call' hours that RDS personnel agree to provide, the annual retainer cannot be reduced by any more than 25%.

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Widespread reliance on the RDS in North Wales

North Wales has 44 fire stations, all of which provide a base for at least one fire engine that is normally crewed by a team of retained firefighters.

Eight of those 44 fire stations also provide a base for at least one fire engine that is normally crewed by a team of wholetime firefighters.

The cost of the RDS

The cost of providing a wholly retained fire station is substantially less than a wholetime fire station, but staffing costs can vary considerably from year to year according to the number of primarily weather-related incidents attended.

The reason for including the Retained Duty System in our Risk Reduction Plan is not so much to do with cost as with being able to maintain cover at the quieter fire stations over the next ten or twenty years.

WHY MAINTAINING 24 HOUR COVER AT RDS FIRE STATIONS IS DIFFICULT

Historical background

If you have ever wondered why some towns and villages have a fire station even though some quite large villages and towns do not – it is the result of local decisions and spontaneous formation of local fire volunteers in years gone by, when people did not have access to modern technology to support their planning decisions. They focused primarily on using local people to protect local property at a time when people generally did not travel very far from home.

Between 1948 and 2004, decisions affecting the number and location of fire stations were subject to formal approval by the Secretary of State. Put off by the extended process of application and public enquiry, most authorities chose to avoid disrupting what was already in place at the end of the second world war.

So although roads, buildings, climate, the way people live and the places people work in relation to their homes have all changed immensely, the location map of fire stations in North Wales is remarkably similar to what it was at the end of the second world war.

(Insert map of North Wales showing locations of stations)

Why is the historical background relevant to today's RDS?

The historical background is relevant because the current terms of the retained duty system relies on people being a) willing and b) able to stay close to their local fire station for up to 120 hours every week and to immediately drop what they are doing if their alerter sounds.

The rigidity of the RDS as a pattern of working has been highlighted nationally as part of the problem of recruitment and retention. Some of our RDS stations respond to fewer than one call per week, but firefighters still have to be available to maintain a full crew in the area that could potentially be called in at any time.

a) Right people, right places

Not everyone is as community-spirited as our RDS crews and their primary employers, but also not every community has housing and employment to offer people within a 4 or 5 minute radius of the fire station, and not every employer can afford to lose staff suddenly in the middle of the working day.

Government figures show that between 1995 and 2005 in Wales, the average distance travelled for business and commercial reasons per year increased from 1,905 miles to 2,012 miles per person.

Perhaps more significantly, the number of short trips for work fell whereas the number of trips up to 10 miles rose, indicating that people are now working further away from home.

b) Time to work and time to rest

A national review of the retained duty system in England and Wales was commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in 2003/04 to look at the long-term recruitment and retention challenges facing fire and rescue authorities.

The issue of the time commitment was acknowledged as anachronistic in today's society, and the impact of any future decision to remove the right to waive the 48 hour weekly working limit under European legislation was also seen as a problem.

When the retained duty system was designed in the 1950s, society and many of the social norms were very different from today.

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1950s	Today
People live and work in the same locality.	Few people live and work in the same town/village. People travel long distances to work.
Employers willing to release worker to attend incidents.	Some employers understand the needs of RDS firefighters, but many do not and are unwilling to release staff due to economies of their business.
People socialise close to the area they live and work in.	People travel during time away from work either for leisure activities or to meet family and friends.
Family commitments are close to home.	Many children's activities take place away from the home area and require parental support for transport.
Socialising, including using alcohol, was not considered incompatible with working. Hence, there was little requirement to abstain at social functions.	Legal position has altered as well as social tolerance. Being unavailable for duty now means not indulging in drinking alcohol at all. This leads to additional time free from duty and hence longer periods of unavailability.
One job for life, possibly in locality. Long working hours culture.	Restrictions on working hours, advice on work life balance.

From "The Fire and Rescue Service Retained Duty System – A Review of the Recruitment and Retention Challenges". Published February 2005.

HOW THESE DIFFICULTIES AFFECT THE SERVICE NOW

Often today we have a fire station and a fire engine available, but not a crew. The term used is that it is 'off the run'. Over the years we have become accustomed to making up for stations being off the run because there aren't enough RDS personnel available at a given time. Some areas are worse affected than others, and days are worse than nights and weekends.

The reasons for this vary.

- **Is it because the Authority doesn't employ enough RDS personnel?**

We don't believe so. There are 45 RDS-crewed fire engines in North Wales that require a minimum of four qualified firefighters on board to operate safely. The Authority maintains 557 RDS posts (as 24 hour units of cover), but, despite this, keeping all those 45 fire engines 'on the run' around the clock is extremely difficult, especially in areas where the majority of working people have to travel several miles to their main employment.

Simply increasing the number of RDS personnel would not necessarily solve the problem of gaps in cover.

- **Is it because the Authority doesn't employ the right people?**

Not at all. Our RDS personnel are dedicated people who care about the communities they protect, but staying close to the fire station for 120 hours per week demands a great deal of dedication and a lifestyle that allows you to do that.

Because of the rigidity of the national terms and conditions of the Retained Duty System and the insistence that the Authority will pay for no less than 75% of the maximum hours (i.e. 90 hours per week), people can be put off because they don't find the long hours an attractive prospect.

Take the 2007-08 year as an example. We attracted 129 applications for RDS posts. 50 were successfully recruited. However, in that same year 47 left, of which 23 cited personal or work reasons, 5 said they were moving out of the catchment area and 9 were changing their main employment.

So despite constant efforts to keep recruiting new people to work the retained duty system, we lost almost as many as we gained.

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The previous year was better, we took on 106 and lost 41, but that is still a very high turnover of staff to deal with.

- **How bad does it get?**

With some careful management the service is able to keep RDS fire engines 'on the run' for around 94% of the year. However, some areas are particularly prone to long periods when cover has to be provided from other areas. Daytime availability of some RDS crews can fall to less than 20% of the month.

In a standard 365 day year there are 8760 hours. If multiplied by 45 RDS fire engines that gives a total of 394,200 hours of cover per year. Even if non-availability is kept down to just 6%, this still means 23,652 hours 'off the run'.

A MENU OF POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Although the public can feel reassured that there is effective cover now, the long term prospects of continuing to provide cover through the existing retained duty system are not so reassuring.

Several possible solutions or partial solutions have been suggested nationally, but most have not yet been fully assessed to see whether they would have the desired effect in North Wales.

The Authority's eventual long term strategy for reducing this risk will help shape future action plans.

The ultimate aim is to ensure that we provide the most effective fire cover across North Wales as efficiently as possible. This may mean that we have to do things differently.

Suggested solutions have included:

- **Widening the pool of applicants**

Being able to encourage more people from different walks of life to apply to be RDS firefighters could go some way towards addressing the problem of providing daytime cover in areas that are not natural centres of employment.

This does not mean lowering standards, but it does mean changing the image of the service and introducing more flexibility and convenience into the employment package. That way, cover could be improved through people living or working close to fire stations but whose stereotyped view of firefighting or the lack of flexible working options had previously prevented them from applying.

Another alternative would be to be more flexible about employing people who could respond to calls from somewhere beyond the 5 minutes zone around a fire station.

- **Moving away from the 'one size fits all' approach**

Rejecting standard approaches in favour of more innovative tailored solutions would give the Authority the flexibility it needs to meet different pressures affecting cover in different areas – e.g. in predominantly rural farming areas as opposed to small villages close to centres of commerce.

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At the moment, the retained duty system is the same for every part of the UK. An insistence that the 100% retainer can only be reduced down to a 75% retainer (but no lower) restricts the opportunity to offer jobs to people who might be available for fewer hours per week or who might prefer term-time working or other arrangements more in keeping with today's flexible working patterns.

- **Using wholetime staff to fill gaps in RDS coverage**

This may be a convenient temporary solution to gaps in cover, but it does not directly provide a long term solution to the fundamental difficulties with the retained duty system.

As well as being expensive, it can also disrupt planned work at short notice for indefinable periods of time.

- **Increasing support for RDS personnel**

One of the frustrations of working on a duty system constructed around responding to emergency incidents and attending a weekly 'drill night' is the sheer volume of work of catching up with study, updating training records and keeping up with developments, especially if the whole crew has to share one computer in a small office in a fire station.

Increasing investment in supporting staff who want to study at home using remote learning and electronic study materials, improving internet access at stations and providing a more conducive working environment could help to keep staff in the job.

- **Ceasing to try to chase full availability**

Communities rarely think of their local fire station as simply garaging and offices, and tend to have a strong emotional attachment to them. The fact that there is no RDS crew available for long periods of time does not seem to diminish this attachment, and people prefer to focus instead on the positive side when RDS crews are available.

As an Authority, we can understand this emotional attachment to local fire stations, but nevertheless owe it to North Wales as a whole to consider whether we are providing the best cover at all times.

Our preferred approach is to support the RDS as a way of providing cover, and we are committed to this for the foreseeable future. However, we reluctantly recognise that we may one day be forced to accept that some RDS fire stations are no longer in the right location to secure full availability, and to consider what permanent changes we can make to the way we provide cover in that area.

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- **Being more creative about where fire engines start out from**

Although it is customary to map coverage against where fire engines are based, modern mapping and mobilising systems can identify and send the closest available resource to an emergency incident. Modern technology can also use past incident patterns to predict the times and locations of busy periods.

As with some other solutions, this approach could resolve the problems of gaps in cover, but does not tackle the anachronisms of the existing retained duty system.

- **Offering a different remuneration model**

Some authorities have introduced salary schemes to replace the 'retainer + fees' model to get round the problem of gradually decreasing pay as the number of emergency calls decreases. Reported difficulties with this have included the very high cost of introducing such a scheme in areas with high numbers of RDS personnel, and complaints from crews called out relatively frequently that they do not get paid any more than their colleagues in quieter areas.

Consultation Question

Do you think that the Authority should redirect resources from its other activities and increase flexibility in the way it employs RDS personnel to maintain and improve the availability of fire crews in rural areas?

RRP TOPIC 3 – CO-RESPONDING

“Most heart attacks can be successfully treated if immediate medical help is provided. The sooner the treatment, the more effective it will be and greater the chance of survival.” NHS Direct Wales

When a person suffers a life-threatening medical emergency, they need medical attention as quickly as possible to give them the best chances of survival. Delay can mean the difference between life and death.

Although the Ambulance Service in Wales aims to reach what they term ‘category A’ calls within just a few minutes, they may be delayed for a variety of reasons, including heavy traffic and remote locations.

A person suffering a cardiac arrest can lose consciousness in a matter of seconds, and unless someone starts cardiopulmonary resuscitation within three or four minutes, the person may suffer permanent damage to the brain and other organs. Early defibrillation and basic life support can greatly increase the chance of survival.

First Responder schemes use volunteers who are trained and equipped by the Ambulance Service to respond to life threatening emergencies in their communities at the request of the Ambulance Service and to provide care for the patient until the ambulance arrives.

In the same way, **Co-Responder** schemes use the fire and rescue service to take on this role, acting, in effect, as an agent to the Ambulance Trust through a formal partnership, and using paid employees rather than volunteers. Several such schemes already exist in the UK, generally targeted at areas of greatest benefit (such as in rural localities), and using fire and rescue service staff who live or work in those areas to get to the patient quickly and provide care until the ambulance arrives.

The obvious benefit of introducing co-responder schemes in parts of North Wales is that lives could be saved. After all, fire and rescue crews are trained to save lives, and the Authority is fully supportive of these schemes in principle.

The difficulty for the Authority, however, is that first aid equipment carried on fire engines is provided primarily for the crew, not for dealing with medical emergencies amongst the general public. More sophisticated equipment and a wider range of medical supplies would be required than is currently carried on fire engines. More training would also be needed for fire and rescue personnel to be able to

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administer life-saving first aid. The cost of these would have to come out of the fire and rescue budget, which would put additional pressure on other areas of fire and rescue activity. Furthermore, Fire Brigades Union members might not readily agree to taking on this work.

SOME COMMON CONCERNS ABOUT CO-RESPONDING

(DISPLAY AS QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS BETWEEN 2 PEOPLE?)

TRANSPORTING PEOPLE TO HOSPITAL

Would critically ill people be visited by fire engines instead of ambulances?

No - ambulances would still attend as quickly as possible, it's just that the co-responder scheme would mean that fire and rescue staff would arrive slightly ahead of the ambulance to take care of the patient in those vital first minutes.

THE SKILLS THAT FIREFIGHTERS WOULD NEED

But fire and rescue staff are not paramedics – they might not have the necessary skills to take care of critically ill people.

Fire crews are already trained to deal with situations where people may be suffering, for example, from shock, breathing difficulties, burns or broken limbs.

As happens with community first responders, firefighters who became co-responders would be equipped and trained to deal with a range of common medical emergencies including in the use of defibrillators which automatically analyse heart rhythms to diagnose heart attacks and deliver electric shock treatment if necessary.

THE WILLINGNESS OF FIREFIGHTERS TO RESPOND

But didn't a recent high court case rule in favour of the Fire Brigades Union's stance that co-responding did not form part of a firefighter's employment contract?

Yes, but this ruling was not about whether or not firefighters ought to undertake this life-saving role – in fact the judge urged the fire authorities and the Fire Brigades Union to begin negotiations to make the scheme work. It was about whether or not the existing contract included co-responding as part of a firefighter's role.

Subject to funds being made available, the option still exists for firefighters to take on this role.

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THE AVAILABILITY OF FIRE CREWS TO RESPOND

What if fire crews got so busy attending medical emergencies that they would not be able to attend fire and rescue emergencies?

It is normal for control staff to deal with more than one incident simultaneously – the service has always had the capacity to respond to both fires and non-fire emergencies. If the service is already fully committed in an area then the option will always remain not to accept the request from the ambulance service.

THE TIME AND COST OF TRAINING AND EQUIPMENT

But isn't it true that all this would be doing, in effect, is plugging a resourcing hole in the ambulance service by transferring some of the cost pressures onto the fire and rescue service?

Despite the very real benefits of working with the ambulance service on this, the authority is not proposing to stretch its existing budget into this area of collaboration. The availability of fire personnel, especially in the more rural areas, makes the scheme an attractive proposal, but sufficient guaranteed resources would be needed to ensure its success.

Consultation Question

Should the Authority introduce co-responding schemes in North Wales, given the financial obligations and possible Fire Brigades Union resistance?

RRP 4 – GENERAL APPROACH TO MAKING EFFICIENCIES

The fire and rescue service is held in high regard as one of the most popular public services for which the public has an enduring affection. We wouldn't want to change that.

However odd it may seem, though, there is a down side to being quite so popular with the public, in that any changes tend to worry people to the extent that the financial impact of not changing can get lost in emotional attachments.

When faced with alternative ways of delivering the fire and rescue service, people often instinctively believe that what they have already is intrinsically safer than what is being proposed.

The Authority has a good track record of operating within its budget and its overall financial position is sound. However, there is no denying that the next few years are likely to challenge even the most resourceful of financial managers in all areas of the public sector, which is why we have included it in this risk reduction plan.

Most of the fire and rescue service's operations are paid for out of money contributed to county councils by businesses and residents. So there is a direct link between how much the fire and rescue service costs and how much is left to pay for council services.

Almost 80% of the fire and rescue authority's budget is spent on employee costs. The remaining 20% is spent on (for example) - premises, communications systems and computers, vehicles, fuel, equipment, training and administration.

Any increase in the fire and rescue budget would be reflected in the amount of money that each county council in North Wales would be expected to contribute. However, in the current financial climate, and during the period of recovery we can expect that difficult budgeting decisions will inevitably have to be made.

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Assuming that doing the same and costing the same is impossible as prices will never remain static, there are six approaches to efficiency that could be adopted:

	Cost less	Cost more
Do less	Strategy ① This would force out 'non-essentials', but risks disappointing the public, falling short of legal and health and safety standards and increasing the pressure on remaining staff. It might also result in an increasingly old-fashioned service, unable to adapt to new challenges and opportunities.	Strategy ② This would be hard to justify as an intentional strategy, but could be an unavoidable consequence of the Authority failing to mitigate the effects of rising costs. It could jeopardise the Authority's position.
Do the same	Strategy ③ This would be difficult to achieve without abandoning planned improvements and reducing the 80% of the budget that is currently spent on employee costs. It would also be hard to sustain from year to year.	Strategy ④ This is the 'do nothing' option which might be viewed as a failure in the current economic climate, given the government expectation that the Authority should work collaboratively with other parts of the public sector. It would also miss the opportunity to develop the service to meet changes in the external environment.
Do more	Strategy ⑤ Even as a short term strategy this would need a high degree of flexibility and acceptance by staff. It could lead to cutting corners, and could prove to be illusory if actual costs were just being forced onto other parts of the public sector. Also, it could be difficult to sustain in the long term, and might hinder recovery when the economy picks up again.	Strategy ⑥ It could be a challenging prospect initially to make the case for continuing to increase costs, unless the benefit of doing more was clearly seen to reduce the demand in other parts of the public sector.

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Consultation Question

Examining the table of options, which strategy do you think the Authority should pursue?

TO RECAP

Here is a reminder of some of the issues raised in this consultation:

RRP 1 – WORKING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

If external funding for youth work were to be withdrawn, should the Authority discontinue its youth activities, or should it redirect resources from its other – possibly front line – services so that it can continue with this work?

RRP 2 – THE RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM OF THE FUTURE

Do you think that the Authority should redirect resources from its other activities and increase flexibility in the way it employs RDS personnel to maintain and improve the availability of fire crews in rural areas?

RRP 3 – TAKING ON CO-RESPONDING

Should the Authority introduce co-responding schemes in North Wales, given the financial obligations and possible Fire Brigades Union resistance?

RRP 4 – GENERAL APPROACH TO EFFICIENCY

What strategy should the authority be aiming for in relation to value for money, affordability and delivering services efficiently?

(ADD QUESTIONNAIRE AND CONTACT DETAILS)

OPTIONS TO:

WRITE IN
SUBMIT A COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE
E-MAIL IN

ASK FOR SOME PERSONAL DETAILS, WHETHER
STAFF/FRA/PUBLIC/ORGANISATION/OTHER)

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

(Suggestions and examples only – linking to -)

NWFERS website for service information (staff, finance, etc.)and examples of costings (WDS/RDS stations, youth work, etc.)
StatsWales website for population, housing and similar
Gwion website for Welsh FRAs’ operational and incident data
CLG website for English FRS data and RDS review report
Ambulance website for co-responding information
NJC (Grey book) website for pay and conditions