

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	15 July 2024
Lead Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Policy and Planning
Contact Officer	Anthony Jones, Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation
Subject	Emergency Cover Review (ECR)



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) with an update on the progress made by the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Task and Finish Group, established in response to the decision made by the Authority at its meeting on 18 December 2023. The purpose of this group was to research and develop a new permanent option for the provision of emergency cover across North Wales.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The ECR Task and Finish group was chaired by a Crew Manager from Deeside Fire Station, with the Deputy Chair a Watch Manager from Rhyl Fire Station. The Group comprised of sixteen colleagues working at various levels, stations and departments within North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service), including representatives of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). They met on nine occasions between February and May 2024, during which they discussed and researched several emergency response models.
- 3 This work concluded with three pieces of emergency response model research being presented by the ECR Task and Finish Group to the Fire Authority ECR Working Group on the 20 May 2024. These three pieces of research represent a significant amount of effort, work and engagement by stakeholders and members of the ECR Task and Finish Group and all offered potential improvements in emergency cover.
- 4 At its meeting on the 20 May 2024, the Fire Authority ECR Working Group requested that the Service review in detail the three pieces of research presented by the ECR Task and Finish Group to provide recommendations at the next Fire Authority ECR Working Group meeting on the 12 June 2024.

- 5 Following further analysis of the three pieces of emergency response model research, presented to the Fire Authority Working Group on 12 June, two of the models have been recommended for further development as potential viable future emergency response models that improve the equity of emergency cover for the communities of North Wales.

RECOMMENDATION

- 6 It is recommended that Members:
- i) approve that Officers continue to work with staff and representative bodies in social partnership to progress, develop and implement ECR Task and Finish Group research models two, and three, or variations of them, following consultation with staff;
 - ii) approve that the Service undertake the necessary arrangements to make suitable the stations identified for the introduction of a day staffing duty system; and
 - iii) appreciate the efforts and contribution made by the ECR Task and Finish Group Members to develop a new permanent option for the provision of emergency cover across North Wales.

BACKGROUND

- 7 During the period of July to September 2023, the Authority consulted the public on three possible options for the future delivery of its emergency response to the communities of North Wales.
- 8 Following the 12-week public consultation exercise the Authority met on 18 December 2023 and decided that:

Members request that Officers continue to work with all stakeholders to develop a new permanent option taking into consideration today's decision and the limits of the proposed budget.

- 9 Therefore, expressions of interest were sought from staff working at all levels across all stations, duty systems and departments and an ECR Task and Finish Group was established in January 2024. The FBU have also been represented and present at every meeting.

INFORMATION

- 10 The ECR Task and Finish Group held its first meeting on 1 February 2024 and have met on nine occasions, discussing the current response model in depth and examining innovative means of providing a future, more equitable emergency response model.

- 11 The ECR Task and Finish Group accepted that improvements in emergency cover, particularly in more rural areas of North Wales are required and understood that any proposals they put forward must meet the ECR evaluation criteria used throughout the development of the original options.
- 12 The ECR Task and Finish Group has been supported by Service departments as required, have had access to emergency response data and modelling and have also received presentations on alternative emergency cover delivery models from other UK Fire and Rescue Services.
- 13 Following each meeting, ECR Task and Finish Group members were tasked with speaking to their colleagues to gauge feedback on the ideas being discussed in order that the wider workforce remain informed on progress. Colleagues were also encouraged to bring their ideas forward to the ECR Task and Finish Group representatives for inclusion in their group discussions.
- 14 The ECR Task and Finish Group explored a variety of future emergency response options and reviewed these against the ECR evaluation criteria and feedback from colleagues.
- 15 Three pieces of emergency response model research were developed and presented by the ECR Task and Finish Group Chair and Deputy Chair to the Fire Authority ECR Working Group on 20 May 2024. These were:
 - **Model 1:** Utilises all 12 Wholetime Duty System Rural (WDSR) firefighters and 89% of the Service's crewing resilience* to provide two new day staffed stations.
 - **Model 2:** Duty system changes are introduced on all fulltime stations to release staff. Utilising staff released by this change, the WDSR firefighters and 78% of the Service's crewing resilience, provides three new day staffed stations.
 - **Model 3:** Aligns the minimum ridership of eight fulltime appliances with the minimum ridership of the on-call Retained Duty System (RDS), WDSR firefighters and Wrexham's second fulltime appliance i.e. appliances crewed with four firefighters. Utilises staff released by this change, the WDSR firefighters and 11% of the Service's crewing resilience to provide three new day staffed stations.

** Crewing resilience is required to cover long term absences, vacancies due to retirements between recruitment campaigns and to cover temporary promotions and secondments.*

- 16 At its meeting on 20 May 2024, the Fire Authority ECR Working Group requested that Officers review the research models and provide recommendations at its meeting on 12 June 2024.
- 17 Following further analysis and evaluation, Officers presented to Fire Authority ECR Working Group Members on the 12 June 2024, and research models two and three were identified as offering potential, viable emergency response models that meet the aims and evaluation criteria of the ECR. Research model one was identified as placing the Service at too much risk regarding resilience of an effective response and offered limited improvement in emergency cover.
- 18 Officers recommended to the Fire Authority ECR Working Group on 12 June 2024 that ECR Task and Finish Group research models two and three be further developed in social partnership with staff and the representative bodies. This was endorsed by the Fire Authority Working ECR Working Group Members for approval by the Authority on 15 July 2024.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The ECR outcomes must meet the Authority's obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
Budget	The consultation budget implications have been publicised. The ECR Task and Finish Group have been reviewing emergency cover options that sit within the current budget.
Legal	Our legislation requires that the Authority must consult the public on changes to our emergency cover. The ECR consultation and the best practices the Services is following as recommended by the Consultation Institute support the Authority in meeting these requirements.
Staffing	The Service has conducted extensive direct consultation with staff and their representative bodies during pre-consultation and this continued during the full public consultation. However, in deciding on options to be presented, staff will be impacted by the proposed changes within the options
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Officer engaged with EDI groups throughout the consultation. The best practice the Service is following and the quality assurance of the consultation by the Consultation Institute, ensures focus on the Authority's requirements in this area.
Risks	The ECR, its consultation and the work of the Task and Finish Group reduces the risks of not being able to respond to emergencies effectively and efficiently in the communities of North Wales.