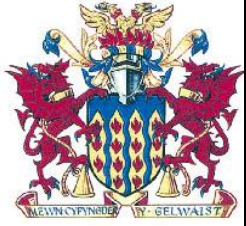


Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority	
Date	20 January 2025	
Lead Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Policy & Planning	
Contact Officer	Anthony Jones, Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation	
Subject	Emergency Cover Review (ECR)	

PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) with an update on the work of 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 to improve the provision of emergency cover across North Wales.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The ECR Task and Finish Group was chaired by a Watch Manager from Deeside Fire Station, with the Deputy Chair a Watch Manager from Rhyl Fire Station. The Group comprised of 16 colleagues working at various levels, stations and departments throughout North Wales fire and Rescue Service (the Service), including representatives of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). They met on 12 occasions between February and November 2024, during which time they discussed and researched several emergency response models.
- 3 At the Authority meeting on 15 July 2024, Members were presented with a progress report and they agreed for the ECR Task and Finish Group to further research models two and three, or variations of them.
- 4 By 10 November 2024, the FBU representatives concluded that model 2 would not work and verbally withdrew from the Task and Finish Group on 11 November 2024.
- 5 On 17 December 2024, the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer met with the workstream leads and the FBU Chair to confirm this position and to thank all those involved for their hard work and diligence.

RECOMMENDATION

- 6 That Members:
- i) Note that officers continued to work with staff and representative bodies in social partnership to develop the ECR Task and Finish Group research models two, three or variations of them.
 - ii) Note the agreed conclusion that the five-watch duty system will not work in North Wales and as a result the withdrawal of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and closure of the task and finish group.
 - iii) Appreciate the efforts and contribution made by the ECR Task and Finish Group Members.
 - iv) Ask officers to continue to devise and test alternative solutions with the representative bodies, within the agreed budget, to address emergency cover in rural locations.

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, the Fire Authority met on 18 December 2023 and concluded:

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.

10 At the Authority meeting on 15 July 2024, Members were presented with a progress report and they agreed for the ECR Task and Finish Group to further research models two and three, or variations of them.

INFORMATION

11 The ECR Task and Finish Group held its first meeting on 1 February 2024 and have since met on 12 occasions, discussing the current response model in depth and examining innovative means of providing a future, more equitable emergency response model.

- 12 The ECR Task and Finish Group has been supported by Service departments as required, had access to emergency response data and modelling and also received presentations on alternative emergency cover delivery models from other UK Fire and Rescue Services.
- 13 Following the Authority meeting and the direction of Members, the ECR Task and Finish Group continued to work on model 2 and model 3.
- **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.
- 14 By 10 November 2024, the FBU representatives concluded that model 2 would not work and verbally withdrew from the Task and Finish Group on 11 November 2024. They then sent the following e-mail by means of explanation:

"Following lengthy discussions with members regarding the five-watch system, it has become clear that this option is not viable for North Wales.

It has come to light over the weekend through communication with members and Control staff in Scotland, that they also struggle to implement this duty shift system properly, with a far larger pool of staff.

This would ultimately lead to this duty shift system being a costly option, without offering an improvement to availability and therefore not within the perimeters set out by the fire authority.

As the only other option left is to drop crewing levels, we feel morally obliged to maintain our stance on this and not engage with any work in order to present this to the fire authority.

This has been put to members and they are also in agreement that it is best to withdraw from the working group."

- 15 On 17 December 2024 the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer met with the workstream leads and the FBU Chair to confirm this position and to thank all those involved for their hard work and diligence.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The ECR outcomes must meet the Authority's obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
Budget	Any solution must be within the approved budget.
Legal	None.
Staffing	The Service has conducted extensive direct consultation with staff and their representative bodies and will continue to do so.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer engaged with ED&I groups throughout the consultation.
Risks	The ECR and the work of the Task and Finish Group seeks to reduce the risks of not being able to respond to emergencies effectively and efficiently in the communities of North Wales.