



AGENDA ITEM: 9

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

20 July 2015

COUNTRYSIDE AND GRASS FIRES SUMMIT MEETING

Report by Richard Fairhead, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To inform Members of the recent countryside and grass fires summit meeting convened by the First Minister following the large number of such fires attended by the fire and rescue services in Wales in April 2015.

Background

- 2 A report to the Executive Panel meeting in May 2015 informed Members that each spring fire and rescue services (FRSs) in Wales experience an increase in the incidence of countryside and grass fires. This regular increase has been attributed to a variety of causes, including landowners burning vegetation and an escalation in antisocial behaviour during school holidays.
- 3 The number of countryside and grass fires in North Wales this spring was broadly comparable with previous years, but there were reports of a significant increase in other parts of Wales, particularly in South Wales, which prompted substantial political and media attention on both the incidences and the causes of such fires.

Information

- 4 On the 29th April 2015 the First Minister met with other Welsh Government Ministers, Chief Fire Officers, Chief Constables and senior representatives from Natural Resources Wales, relevant local authorities and the Meteorological Office to discuss the recent increase in grass fires, and to work out a plan for reducing them.
- 5 The summit meeting identified a set of five actions for the FRSs to focus on and to report progress to the Welsh Government. These are, that they will:
 - i. respond swiftly and effectively to all grass fires, and support each other as and when required;
 - ii. continue to deliver targeted programmes for young people at risk of offending, which have a proven record in diverting them away from crime and anti-social behaviour;
 - iii. work with local authorities and schools in high-risk areas to communicate hard-hitting messages about the dangers of deliberate fire-setting;
 - iv. support citizens and community groups to provide early warning of grass fires or those who may be planning to set them;
 - v. consider using unmanned aerial vehicles (“drones”) in areas of highest risk, both to identify those attempting to set fires and to support firefighting operations.
- 6 North Wales FRS has responded to the actions and provided information on its: effective operational response; continuing delivery of the Phoenix programme; work through the Arson Reduction Team; programme for visiting schools; and work within the communities of North Wales raising awareness and promoting fire safety.

- 7 Particular emphasis was placed in its response on the targeted prevention work with children and young people through the Phoenix team and the Arson Reduction Team. Information was also provided about North Wales FRS's close working with its partners – particularly North Wales Police – and where fires had been started deliberately, the actions taken by North Wales Police to deal with the alleged perpetrators.
- 8 North Wales FRS's work with landowners was highlighted, where education and information is provided about their responsibilities when undertaking controlled burning to clear vegetation from their land. Part of this is for landowners to notify the Service of their intention to undertake controlled burning, which reduces the number of unnecessary attendances by the Service in response to well-intended reports of fire made by members of the public. In the first six months of 2015, the Service received 2011 such notifications of controlled burning.
- 9 North Wales FRS, through its corporate communications department, fire safety function and Arson Reduction Team, will continue to work with partners to reduce the number of countryside and grass fires requiring an attendance by the Service.
- 10 As regards the action to consider the use of unmanned aerial vehicles ("drones"), following discussions with North Wales Police it has been decided that their use is currently not required in North Wales.

Recommendation

- 11 That Members note the information contained within this report.