

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

FIRE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL REPORT

DATE:	31 st January 2005
REPORT BY:	CHIEF FIRE OFFICER
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To inform Members of progress being made by the Assembly on the Welsh Fire and Rescue National Framework, and the outcome of the Authority's response to the consultation in April 2004

1. **BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Last year, the Welsh Assembly Government consulted on its first draft Fire and Rescue Service National Framework for Wales, and invited comments on it by May 3rd 2004. The consultation asked 17 questions relating to specific areas of the draft.
- 1.2 At its meeting of 22nd April 2004, the Executive Panel discussed and agreed its response to the draft, which was subsequently submitted as required (see Appendix 1).
- 1.3 The Assembly's intention at that time was to provide, during the summer of 2004, a final version of the Framework for the financial year 2004-05, and to publish revisions each autumn thereafter.

2. **INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The draft Framework is still undergoing revision, but is understood to be nearing completion. A 'near final' version was discussed at a meeting of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee on December 8th 2004 (see appendix 2). The Minister invited comments from the members of the committee, and advised that the Framework was scheduled "to go before plenary in the New Year".
- 2.2 In some parts, this 'near final' version differs markedly from the original version. Some changes have been introduced to bring the document up to date or to add more detail. Other changes – although not yet ratified – introduce some significant departures from the original.

3. **AMENDMENTS APPEARING IN THE 'NEAR FINAL' DRAFT**

- 3.1 The following sections report how comments made by the Executive Panel last April are reflected in the 'near final' draft.

3. **AMENDMENTS APPEARING IN THE 'NEAR FINAL' DRAFT** (continued)

3.2 Questions 1-3 - Membership of the Wales Fire and Rescue Service Strategic Committee (WF&RSSC).

Members supported the proposal to make this a small high level advisory committee, but emphasised the importance of having the Chiefs and Chairs of all three fire and rescue authorities in Wales as members of it.

This has not been accepted – the latest version lists the membership that will be appointed by the Minister as: *"a representative of the Fire and Rescue Authorities; a Chief of the Fire and Rescue Service; a representative of the Fire and Rescue Service employees; a representative of local authorities; a representative of community and town councils and a representative of business and industry"*.

3.3 Questions 4 - 5 - Membership of the Community Fire Safety Committee (CFSC)

Members wished to include a wide diversity of representatives onto this committee, and suggested co-opting some members when specific issues arise. These proposals have been accepted, and included in the relevant paragraph.

3.4 Question 6 – Targets and improved outcomes

Members' response related to their concerns about the resource implications of working to reduce deaths and injuries on the roads; the need to tackle health and social issues; and their strong rejection of the proposal to designate some fire deaths as 'preventable' without first having been given a workable definition of such a classification.

The latest draft refers to Road Safety Plans and the Traffic Management Act 2004, and to the possibility of tackling some of the health and social issues through the Joint Emergency Services Group.

The reference to 'preventable deaths and serious injuries by fires' has not been changed.

3.5 Question 7 – Tackling anti-social behaviour

The question on this section of the first draft document asked about tackling anti-social behaviour through IRMPs and partnership working.

In response, Members outlined the Service's long record of involvement in collaborative partnerships, and their difficulty in envisaging what might force the pace of this work other than by increasing the Service's influence or finding a way to dramatically reduce some of the causal factors such as substance abuse.

The near final draft introduces new paragraphs on the involvement of the service in the growing numbers of Local Strategic Partnerships, and Community Safety Partnerships being set up, and refers to a range of other opportunities for tackling community issues.

However, this part of the framework, addressing integrated risk management planning, community fire safety, fire safety behaviour, and arson reduction has been extensively amended and expanded. Paragraphs have been added stipulating the importance of consulting widely on draft IRMPs, formally evaluating all responses in an open and transparent way, and summarising the Authority's reaction to them.

3. **AMENDMENTS APPEARING IN THE 'NEAR FINAL' DRAFT** *(continued)*

3.5 Question 7 – Tackling anti-social behaviour *(continued)*

A significant unforeseen addition here is the requirement that Authorities should both “consult the Assembly in advance of finalising their IRMP for the year” and “obtain the approval of the Assembly Government to any proposals emerging from the authority’s IRMP to close or downgrade a fire station”.

3.6 Question 8 – Building Regulations, Regulatory Reform Order and Crown Premises

The consultation asked whether enough was being done in Wales to manage risk through the legislative framework.

NWF&RA's response repeated Members' strong support for the principle of installing sprinkler systems in domestic premises, particularly those at high risk. The near final draft of the section on Building Regulations has been completely re-written, reflecting the fact that these regulations have not been devolved to the Assembly, and describing the work being done by the UK Government and the ODPM.

3.7 Question 9 – Collaboration and achieving economies of scale

Members were of the opinion that the Assembly was indeed doing enough to ensure collaboration between the three Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities, but expected other opportunities to arise in future.

The near final draft points out that the conclusion drawn by Mott MacDonald that one control room for Wales would be optimal is now a matter for the Assembly. References to a single control room for Wales being feasible “only if it remains in partnership with the regional control rooms in England” have been deleted.

Although “the case for further amalgamation [of fire authorities] has not been made” following the 1996 reorganisation, the draft supports Members' expectation that other opportunities for collaboration will present themselves.

The paragraph on new premises-sharing initiatives between different emergency services (police, ambulance and fire and rescue) in Crymych, Llandeilo, Aberystwyth, Cardigan and Carmarthen, has been retained. The Assembly sees these premises sharing initiatives as being a manifestation of emergency services working together ‘in the best interests of our communities’.

3.8 Question 10 – First Responder or Co-Responder Schemes

Members were cautious in their response to the single question on first or co-responder schemes, and stated clearly that they wished to properly assess the implications of such schemes, and be convinced by the ambulance service that patient outcomes would be improved.

The draft, however, maintains that “where outcomes can be improved by adapting services or working with other service providers, this should be pursued”. It refers to schemes such as Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service's five First Responder Schemes which, “should be expanded to encompass all areas of Wales”. The near final draft introduces a commitment by the Assembly to “support discussions between Welsh FRAs and the medical and ambulance service to explore the further advantages and implications of this, perhaps initially on a priority area basis”.

3. **AMENDMENTS APPEARING IN THE 'NEAR FINAL' DRAFT** (continued)

3.8 Question 10 – First Responder or Co-Responder Schemes (continued)

Despite this having been the only question on Section 4 – Effective Response, the redrafted version introduces a substantial and unexpected change to another part of that section that in respect of fire, the fire and rescue service (sic.) “*must ensure that appropriate levels of resources are deployed, within agreed timescales, to incidents to achieve Assembly Government Service Delivery Standards. [These standards] will be the subject of detailed guidance to be issued during 2005 and will include an examination of the level and deployment of resources*”.

Neither the Authority nor the Service was consulted on this new requirement, and no mention was made of it in the first draft.

3.9 Questions 12-13 - Responding to threats, civil contingencies and resilience

These sections have been extensively re-written to take account of progress already made and to add more detail. NWF&RA's concerns about differences between mobilising equipment and procedures in Wales and in the new regional control rooms in England with respect to resilience and inter-operability have been touched upon in the section dealing with *Firelink*, the new national radio system for F&RAs. The Assembly takes the view (paragraph 5.28) that as the roll-out of the new system will take several years, there will be sufficient time to plan for this.

3.10 Questions 14-15 – Human resources management and workforce development

Following Members' reminder that the integrated personal development system (IPDS) will be used by all staff, including non-uniformed support staff, references to this group of employees have now been added.

3.11 Question 16 – Performance management

Only minor changes have been made, to reflect current thinking. However, this section is still subject to amendment in line with the new Fire and Rescue WPI, which is still under development. The paragraphs on e-Government also confirm the inclusion of the fire and rescue services in the Cymru Ar-lein work.

3.12 Question 17 – Research

Only minor changes have been made, to reflect the current position.

3.13 General Comments

Members' disappointment at how few references were made in the document to equalities issues, and particularly to Welsh language issues, has been partially addressed. The importance of having a diverse workforce has been reinforced in section 6, in relation to both the profile of the workforce itself, and to the opportunities and flexibilities available to them. There is still only one reference to the Welsh language, which is made in the context of staff development under the Welsh National Workforce Development Strategy.

3. **AMENDMENTS APPEARING IN THE 'NEAR FINAL' DRAFT** *(continued)*

Members had also made a general comment that the draft document was unclear in places, and contained a number of errors. Several errors are still evident in the updated version, most of which are minor. Some incorrect references to the Fire and Rescue 'Authority', the Fire and Rescue 'Service' and the fire and rescue service in general may cause some confusion.

4. **EFFECT OF AMENDMENTS AND ADDITIONS TO THE DRAFT FRAMEWORK**

4.1 Some amendments have been made to the draft either in response to consultation, to correct some errors, or to reflect the progress that has already taken place since the consultation last year.

4.2 If retained in the final published framework, however, some amendments in the later draft would seem to constitute significant departures from the original draft. Fire and Rescue Authorities have not been consulted on some issues, and the insertion of late and unpredicted additions has created a document that contains conflicting messages. These primarily concern, on the one hand, delivering locally determined levels of service based on an Authority's own assessment of local risk, and, on the other, providing services according to Service Delivery Standards which the Assembly would set for the Authority.

5 **POWERS OF INTERVENTION**

New paragraphs have been inserted in the draft framework warning that "*Authorities should have regard for their statutory duties in relation to this framework*" and the "*Assembly's power of intervention under the framework is different from, and additional to, the Assembly's powers if an Authority fails to comply with the statutory requirements relating to best value*".

Although not stated, these are probably references to Section 21(7) and Sections 22 to 24 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 (see appendix 3).

However, section 21(5) of the Act also requires that the National Assembly for Wales should consult on the National Framework, or any significant revisions to it.

Members may wish to consider whether some of the changes described above constitute a 'significant' change that should be subject to separate consultation with them.

5 **RECOMMENDATION**

5.1 That Members note the existence of the 'near final' draft, consider the issues raised by the most recent publication, and decide what response, if any, they wish to make.