

## NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

### FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY INTEGRATED RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP REPORT

DATE:	13 <sup>th</sup> March 2006
REPORT BY:	<b>Paul Claydon, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)</b>
PURPOSE OF REPORT:	To summarise to Members the responses received to the consultation on the draft Integrated Risk Management third year action plan.

#### 1. **INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 At its meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2005, North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (NWFRA) approved, for consultation, its Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) third year action plan, "Maintaining Momentum".
- 1.2 Notification was sent to over 500 individuals, companies and organisations, drawing their attention to the consultation and its availability on the Service's website. Press releases were also issued to highlight the consultation process and the document's availability. Copies of the document were sent to all Service establishments.

#### 2. **LEVEL OF RESPONSE**

- 2.1 The level of response to the proposals for the third year was higher than to the proposals for the first two years. Responses came from 39 different people, groups of people or organisations. Letters and e-mails continued to be received right through to the end of the consultation period, with around one third of the responses having been received during the period beyond the original deadline of 1<sup>st</sup> March.
- 2.2 Responses from **the general public** were received from:
  - 6 Llandudno residents (4 living in the same block of flats)
  - 1 Wrexham resident
  - 2 Barmouth residents
  - 1 Residents' Association in Rhos on Sea
  - 1 Residents' Forum in Colwyn Bay
  - The manager of a hotel in Llandudno
  - The Chairman of the Llandudno Hospitality Association
  - A property management company in Llandudno
  - 185 signatories to a petition from a Youth Club in Llandudno

- 2.3 Responses from **politicians** were received from:
- 2 Assembly Members
  - 3 Members of Parliament
  - 1 Member of the House of Lords
  - 1 County Councillor (Flintshire)
- 2.4 Responses from **councils** were received from:
- 4 Town Councils (Barmouth, Colwyn Bay, Llandudno and Chirk)
  - 2 County Councils (Conwy and Denbighshire)
- 2.5 Responses from **unions** were received from:
- 2 Unions (Retained Firefighters Union and Fire Brigades Union)
- 2.6 Responses from **members of staff** were received from:
- 1 Group Manager
  - 3 Watch Managers
  - 2 Crew Managers
  - 2 Wholetime firefighters and 13 retained firefighters from one fire station sent a single response duplicated and individually signed 15 times.
  - 1 retired Chief Fire Officer
- 2.7 The Fire Protection Association wrote asking for information to help populate a database for use by insurers.
- 2.8 Three responses were received **after the closing date** from:
- A couple in Llandudno Junction (no address provided)
  - An unidentified individual (message via e-mail)
  - Abergele Town Council who had been unaware of the consultation and had not had an opportunity to discuss or respond to it.

### 3. **SUMMARY OF THE POINTS RAISED IN RELATION TO SPECIFIC PROPOSALS**

#### **Reduction in the Number of Aerial Ladder Platforms (ALPs)**

- 3.1 The proposal to reduce the number of ALPs to three, based at Wrexham, Rhyl and Bangor attracted the largest response.
- 3.2 One council "strongly endorsed the review of aerial appliances and the adoption of a 30 minute time standard, and considered that the choice of which appliance should be removed was a matter for the fire authority to determine on the basis of risk and financial implications".
- 3.3 One respondent (not from Llandudno) supported the reduction of ALPs to three, but questioned the proposal not to site one in Llandudno. This person wished to remind the Authority that greater savings could be made by removing the ALP from the 24 hour fire station at Rhyl, and suggested that the risk profiles of Rhyl and Llandudno should be compared before finally deciding to remove the ALP from one of them.
- 3.4 A similar proposal related to keeping all four ALPs but crewing them fully with retained firefighters, so that staffing costs would be reduced.

- 3.5 An alternative proposal was for the Authority to keep the ALP capability at Llandudno by replacing the ALP and one fire appliance at Llandudno with a multi-role aerial/pumping fire appliance.
- 3.6 There were several respondents, however, who did not agree with a change to a 30 minute standard. People from Llandudno in particular feared that if they had to rely on an ALP from either Rhyl or Bangor to arrive, any people trapped by fire in the many tall buildings in the town would be put at greater risk.
- 3.7 The profile of Llandudno as a major tourist resort with many hotels and several new building developments was a recurring theme. Some respondents referred to the particular difficulty of getting in and out of the town when traffic flow is congested.
- 3.8 One respondent also pointed out that the tourist population increased in the summer months in Llandudno at the same time as the student population decreased in Bangor.
- 3.9 There was some nervousness about the forthcoming changes to certification, whereby responsibility will transfer from the fire and rescue service to the people in charge of premises, and making the case that this was not a good time to think of removing the ALP.
- 3.10 Some of the responses were clearly heartfelt, with people earnestly appealing to the Authority not to remove the ALP from their town. Others were angered by what they considered to be nothing but a cost-cutting exercise.
- 3.11 There was an element of misinformation circulating. A petition signed by 185 adults and children at the Tŷ Llywelyn Community Centre in Llandudno stated that following a visit from the fire service to the youth club, people were 'very sad and shocked to hear the aerial ladder is to be transferred to St Asaph'. They said that the 'decision due to cuts' could result in fatalities. The wording of the petition asked people to show their 'support for the fire brigade' by signing it.
- 3.12 Three people living in the same premises on Abbey Road, Llandudno, wrote to the MP for Conwy objecting to the relocation of the ALP from Llandudno to Bangor. However, having received a fuller explanation of the issues from Officers, two of them wrote back to the Service stating that their fears had now been allayed, and that they would be sharing the information with their fellow residents.

### **Phasing out of Emergency Tenders (ETs)**

- 3.13 This particular element of the overall review of the provision of special appliances across the whole of North Wales was probably the least well understood. Objections were predominantly based on a false assumption that ETs from Colwyn Bay and Dolgellau would be removed, leaving a void that constituted a reduction in rescue capability in those specific areas.
- 3.14 Although there was support for the upgrading of hydraulic rescue equipment on frontline fire engines, respondents mistrusted the quality of the special appliance review, and were concerned that fire engines could not carry the entire array of specialist equipment carried on board an ET.

- 3.15 Some operational staff worried that crews on fire engines would lack the specialist expertise of crews on ETs. Concerns were also raised about the health and safety of crews.
- 3.16 The Authority was again accused of making changes purely on the basis of trying to save money.

### **Provision of Narrow Wheelbase Vehicles**

- 3.17 One town council and two members of the public wrote in objecting to the removal of the Pinzgauer/'small fire engine' from Barmouth, again accusing the Authority of cost cutting at the expense of public safety. In particular, they were concerned that larger vehicles might not be able to get through some of the narrower roads and streets in the area. Although not stated, respondents seemed to incorrectly assume that these vehicles were designed and equipped to fight fires.

### **Charging for Attending False Alarms from Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs)**

- 3.18 Response to this proposal was mixed. Two responses fully supported the proposal, and two objected to it on the grounds that call management would be a better option because of the risk that AFA use and ownership might diminish for fear of having to pay for fire and rescue service attendance at false alarms.
- 3.19 A fifth response took the middle ground, stating that any such proposals should represent an incentive to cut the number of false alarms, but not a disincentive to property owners to fit AFAs.

### **Co-responding**

- 3.20 Response to this proposal was cautious. Although there was some enthusiastic support for the Authority to trial co-responding, there was some nervousness that crews might be required to gain skills as paramedics in order to administer intravenous drugs to life threatened casualties.
- 3.21 Others were not yet convinced that co-responding was a good thing for the fire service to undertake, but nevertheless were willing to see the introduction of a trial, provided that a full evaluation was undertaken to assess the impact on the service.

### **Increasing Engagement with Households in Rural Communities**

- 3.22 This prompted a range of responses. Some were fully supportive of the proposal, seeing this as a good way to improve public safety. Others were puzzled by it, pointing out that the Service was already undertaking community fire safety (CFS) work and that the proposal to engage more with households, particularly those located more than 20 minutes away from a fire station, represented nothing new. One respondent felt that householders should be made aware of the estimated time that it would take for a fire appliance to reach them from the nearest fire station.

- 3.23 There were some misgivings that sufficient numbers of retained firefighters might not, in fact, be available to undertake CFS. One respondent urged the Authority to promote the use of 'full time professional firefighters' to undertake this work, and asked what 'measurable outputs' had been produced in relation to the involvement of retained personnel to undertake CFS.
- 3.24 There was some concern, too, that the service might not have sufficient capacity to undertake all the home fire safety risk assessments that it would wish to undertake, and questioned whether this could, in fact, be achieved within existing budgets. One member of staff felt that the Authority was putting heavy reliance on retained staff, and asking for "a full time job commitment from part time employees".
- 3.25 One member of staff challenged the estimate that 2,500 properties in North Wales were over 20 minutes away from a fire station, stating that this was nearer 4,700 - almost double the initial estimate. This respondent also challenged the basic assumption that people living over 20 minutes away from a fire station are, in fact, at greater risk, because those dying in fire 'tend to be within the 20 minute travel time from our stations'.

#### **New Locating Technology**

- 3.26 This proposal was generally supported, although one respondent warned against diverting too much money away from front line service delivery to pay for expensive software and hardware.
- 3.27 Two members of staff took the opportunity to make the case for allowing operational crews to undertake hydrant maintenance inspections, to both improve their local knowledge and to engage more with the local community.

#### **Overarching Performance Monitoring System**

- 3.28 This proposal was supported as 'an innovative and informative project', with an additional reminder from one respondent that the data collection system would need to dovetail with national data capture and analysis systems.

#### **Review of the Provision of Managers for Operational Incidents**

- 3.29 This proposal was generally supported. The Retained Firefighters Union wished to work with the Skills, Learning and Development Centre on maintaining high standards of command management through appropriate training of RDS personnel. The Fire Brigades Union wanted the review to be undertaken on the basis of the Fire Service Manual Volume 2 : Fire Service Operations – Incident Command.
- 3.30 One member of staff made the point that the restructure of the Service has already had an effect on the response profile of incident managers, and that care should be taken when using historical data to ensure that the time period used is the most relevant. The need to maintain skills should also be taken into consideration.

- 3.31 One member of staff was also concerned that any proposals to reduce the middle management roles might leave the Service vulnerable during spate conditions, risk breaches of health and safety guidelines and have an adverse effect on supervisory roles due to lowered morale.

#### 4 **SUMMARY OF THE POINTS RAISED IN RELATION TO GENERAL MATTERS**

- 4.1 One response expressed disappointment that progress is being slowed by the involvement of the Welsh Assembly Government that has resulted in a 'timid IRMP that is merely tinkering and in some ways non-urgent'.
- 4.2 One council suggested analyzing the impact and likelihood of each risk, so that these could then be prioritized (significant, medium or low). Actions to manage the risks would also benefit from being 'smarter' with timescales and measures to evidence progress clearly identified.
- 4.3 One council objected to not having been formally consulted on this proposed action plan. They did not feel that picking it up from newspaper reports about objections and then being informed that the consultation document was available from the website constituted 'proper consultation'.
- 4.4 One member of the public accused the Service of behaving in a 'sneaky and underhand way' by not making people aware of this consultation, thereby trying to get the proposals through without objections. He berated the Service for not having distributed leaflets or press notices, and stated that the first he knew of it was via the Welsh news at the end of January. Staff at one fire station claimed that as the draft third year action plan was only available via the internet, this "reduced the number of persons able to consult on the document".
- 4.5 One county councillor wanted simply to 'keep North Wales Fire Authority as exactly that – an Authority for North Wales. We all benefit from localized services.'
- 4.6 One council supported the additional steps being taken by NWFRA to test and challenge historic patterns of response and implement new, more cost effective arrangements so long as they do not add substantially to the current risks.
- 4.7 Some respondents were unhappy that the level of detail in the consultation document did not allow readers to develop a balanced view, and that statistical evidence and data sets had not been provided as a backdrop to the third year action plan.
- 4.8 Some members of staff felt unhappy with the Service's structure, and stated that they felt remote from senior managers. Some urged the Authority to involve staff more.
- 4.9 The attendance of Principal Officers and the Chair at meetings to discuss the issues had been appreciated.

5. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 5.1 That Members note the responses to the consultation.
- 5.2 That Members consider amendments and recommendations on the third year action plan "Maintaining Momentum" for formal discussion at the Executive Panel.