

Report to	Audit Committee
Date	20 March 2023
Lead Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Subject	New Training Centre Update



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 This report presents an update on the work undertaken on the production of a detailed business case for a new fire and rescue training and development centre in North Wales.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is committed to the provision of essential operational training to its staff to support service delivery and firefighter safety. The Chief Fire Officer's assessment undertaken during 2021 identified training as a priority area and Authority approval was given to undertake a full review on the future delivery of operational training and development in North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service).
- 3 This has included a review of current operational training facilities, including those located at Dolgellau and Rhyl fire stations. This review identified the need to invest in new training and development facilities to ensure firefighter operational preparedness and safety. In particular, there is a need to provide practical and immersive training experiences across a range of scenarios.
- 4 The review of operational training facilities in the Service also supports the findings of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's thematic review of operational training within the Welsh Fire and Rescue Services, which recognises the need for significant capital investment required to replicate real-world conditions for firefighters to develop and refresh their operational skills.
- 5 Following approval by the Authority, on 17 October 2022 to allocate a budget for the development of a detailed business case for a new training and development centre, a number of options have been explored by the project team.

- 6 This work has included the identification of a suitable piece of land to locate the new training and development centre in Denbighshire.
- 7 The next steps will be for the Authority to enter a six-month exclusivity agreement with the land owner, to enable the relevant surveys, suitability assessments and discussions with local planning officers prior to the submission of an outline planning application.
- 8 It is anticipated that the next stage of the project will take approximately six months, and will conclude with the presentation of the business case for the land purchase and options to the Authority on 23 October 2023.
- 9 A budget for land purchase has been included in the Authority's 2023/24 budget, with its use conditional to Members approval following the production of a robust business case by Officers.

RECOMMENDATION

- 10 It is recommended that Members:
 - (i) note the background to reviewing Fire and Rescue training facilities in North Wales;
 - (ii) note that the current training provision is reaching its end of life;
 - (iii) note that the next stage of the project, to confirm the suitability of the identified land, has commenced;
 - (iv) note the timescales set out in this report for the provision of a detailed business case for Members' consideration; and
 - (v) identify Members from each constituent council to form a working group to help to develop and scrutinise plans for a new training centre.

BACKGROUND

- 11 At a meeting of the Authority on 20 September 2021, the three main priorities for the Service were identified by the Chief Fire Officer in her situational assessment. They included improving availability, improving training and strengthening the corporate structure. Members endorsed these priorities and allocated initial funding to support these areas.
- 12 Training has been reviewed and improved by developing a new training strategy. Funding has been allocated to pay for more trainers and the operational training facilities at Dolgellau require to be replaced.

- 13 The report presented to the Authority on 17 October 2022 recommended that an initial budget was allocated to develop the business case for a new training centre.
- 14 The new training centre project team have consulted with staff, building construction professionals, sustainability experts and an architect to develop a high-level design for a new training and development centre in North Wales. This has also included the identification of a piece of land assessed as being suitable because of its geographical location and size.

INFORMATION

- 15 The Service has undertaken a detailed review of its operational training facilities at Rhyl and Dolgellau fire stations, and as a result it has become apparent that they do not provide the facilities required to train firefighters operating in a modern-day fire and rescue service.
- 16 Although the fire house training facility at Dolgellau fire station continues to be used for operational training, it requires significant investment to extend its medium-term life span for risk critical breathing apparatus and firefighting tactics training and cannot be considered as a long-term option. It is also located in an area of North Wales which is a considerable distance for the majority of our staff to travel and attend breathing apparatus courses.
- 17 During the past decade the Authority will have noted the number of fires and other emergency incidents have reduced significantly. Although this is a success story for the fire prevention work that has taken place in our communities during this time, it has resulted in the risk of firefighters having less exposure to the wide range of hazards and complex situations they are likely to face when attending such incidents.
- 18 Fire contaminants are also a risk present in the smoke and toxic flammable gases released during fires, and may contribute to cancer and other health conditions in firefighters. So, the management of fire contaminants needs to be included in a new training and development centre design. Though interim measures have been put in place, the long-term management of fire contaminants is a health and safety concern at the current training facilities at Dolgellau.
- 19 To mitigate these risks, operational training and development for our staff in a realistic and immersive training environment, which includes adequate health and safety measures, needs to be at the forefront of a training and development centre design. This will provide essential facilities for at least the next 25 years in North Wales.

- 20 At a meeting of the Authority on 17 October 2022, the recommendation to allocate an initial budget to the project was approved, which included the option to enter into an exclusivity agreement with a landowner of a site assessed as being suitable regarding size and location.
- 21 Since that meeting of the Authority, suitable land for locating a training and development centre has been identified in Denbighshire and, following constructive conversations with the land agent and local planning office, the Authority is about to enter into an exclusivity agreement with the land owner to undertake the necessary surveys and land suitability assessments. This agreement does not bind the Authority to the purchase but allows for all due diligence to be undertaken.
- 22 It is anticipated that the next phase of the project will take approximately six months and include conducting the relevant land surveys and assessments, and further dialogue with the Denbighshire Local Authority planning office to satisfy their requirements prior to submitting a pre-planning application.
- 23 The results of the site surveys and a pre-planning application to the local planning office will be reviewed and recommendations for site purchase may be presented to the Authority at its meeting on 23 October 2023, depending on the outcomes.
- 24 A budget for land purchase has been included in the Authority's 2023/24 budget, with its use conditional to Members approval following the production of a robust business case by Officers.
- 25 Separate to the purchase of land, the detailed business case for the new training and development centre is scheduled to be completed for July 2023 and will be brought to Members for further scrutiny and approval at that time.
- 26 If approved a timetable will be developed, although it is envisaged that building work could commence during early part of 2025 following a planning application, detailed design brief development and procurement of a main contractor.
- 27 Members will be kept updated and informed on the progress of the project as it develops during the proceeding months.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	This project is aligned to all of the Well-being and Corporate Objectives 2022/23 and will promote firefighter safety, support operational preparedness and ensure sustainability over the longer term
Budget	Members approved the use of £250,000 from reserves to develop a detailed business case for the options of a new training and development centre in NWFRS. An additional budget will be required for land purchase and building costs, should the business case be approved.
Legal	The Authority has a duty under the Health and Safety legislation to ensure the sufficiency of training of its staff, management of risks such as contaminants. The project also addressed the wider legal obligation to reduce carbon emissions.
Staffing	Project team and stakeholders are included in the Project Initiation Document (PID) for approval at Service Leadership Team. The project supports staff health and safety and wellbeing.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	Implications for the protected characteristics are covered within the PID Integrated Impact Assessment.
Risks	All risks are included in the PID risk register.