



AGENDA ITEM: 12

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

16th July 2012

DEVELOPMENT OF RESPONSE STANDARD

Report by Shân Morris, Corporate Planning Manager

Purpose of Report

- 1 To inform members of progress being made towards the development of a Dwelling Fire Response Standard.

Introduction

- 2 Various national standards of fire cover were applied to UK fire services between 1944 and 2003. Although reviewed from time to time these standards largely maintained the original focus of limiting fire spread from one building to another, rather than on reducing the risk to the lives of their occupants.
- 3 In 1995 an Audit Commission Report, "In the Line of Fire", recommended a shift of emphasis from firefighting (cure) to fire safety (prevention) and argued that research should be undertaken into risk assessed fire cover.
- 4 In 2003, the UK Government announced a repeal of the Standards of Fire Cover that were in force at the time, and initiated a process of Integrated Risk Management Planning that required each Fire Authority to develop its own risk assessed response to incidents that was appropriate in its own setting.

- 5 In 2005, after responsibility for fire and rescue services in Wales had been devolved, the Welsh Government established a working group to come up with a Service Standard for Attendance at Fires in the Home. This first Welsh standard applied across the whole of Wales, and aimed to ensure that 80% of dwellings in Wales would be close enough to firefighting resources to enable a fire engine to arrive within 10 minutes. This was measured by reference to those dwellings that were located within a mapped 'catchment area' of a fire station.
- 6 By 2009, however, it had become evident that there were problems with the calculation of such a standard. For example, the 10 minutes calculation included an allowance for the time needed for the Retained Duty System crews and the Day Crewing System overnight crews to respond to the fire station, with the effect of limiting the catchment area said to fall 'within the 10 minute standard' to very close proximity to a fire station.
- 7 It was also noted that in larger towns and cities where fire stations are located in heavily built up areas the 80% calculation would naturally be more easily achieved than in rural areas where dwellings are distributed over a much larger area.
- 8 Consequently, a review of the 2006 Service Standard to Fires in the Home led the Welsh Government to develop an alternative approach which would better accommodate the different profiles of the three Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) areas. Each FRA would be required to develop and consult locally on its own dwelling fire response criteria, subject to a single set of 'guiding principles' issued by the Welsh Government.
- 9 A Fire and Rescue Circular issued in March 2012 states that:
"The Welsh Government expects FRAs in Wales to improve public safety by reducing the instances of death, injury and accidental fires within domestic dwellings, whilst reducing firefighter operational injuries. The Guiding Principles will support FRAs in meeting their statutory duties, whilst at the same time recognising the differences between the areas of the Authorities."

Information

- 10 Each FRA is expected to develop and consult on its local response criteria, and publish them in its Improvement Plan for 2013-14.
- 11 Presented with an opportunity to take a collaborative approach to the development of local response criteria, the three fire and rescue services have jointly prepared a draft 'All-Wales Dwelling Fire Response Charter' for consideration by the soon to be established National Issues Committee.
- 12 The draft Charter takes account of the requirement for FRAs to design and consult on local response criteria but also takes the opportunity to ensure a level of consistency across Wales.
- 13 If adopted, the Charter would provide Welsh residents and householders with a clear picture of what they can expect from their Fire and Rescue Service, but without fettering the FRAs' discretion to determine what is appropriate for their own areas.
- 14 Specific performance standards, measures and indicators would therefore remain a matter for each FRA to determine according to its own processes of development and consultation.
- 15 FRAs may therefore include the Charter and local criteria in the development of their 2013-14 Improvement Objectives.

Recommendation

- 16 That members note the progress being made and proposed future steps towards the development of a North Wales FRA Dwelling Fire Response Standard.