



Our plans for fire and rescue services in North Wales

Information and public consultation on proposed
improvement objectives for 2014-15 and beyond

Public Consultation
16th September 2013 to 9th December 2013

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INTRODUCTION

The risks that face North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority are changing. Like many other public sector organisations the Authority faces the prospect of meeting a potential increase in demand, but with less money.

In much the same way as individuals look to re-evaluate the way they live and to revise their plans for the future, so the Authority too is having to reconsider how it provides and delivers its services so as to put it in the best possible position to deliver high quality and effective services in North Wales over the next 20 or 30 years.

The Authority's aim is to provide continuously improving services in the most effective and efficient way it can with the money it has available. This usually involves introducing new and innovative ways of doing things.

One important aspect of that continuous improvement is the emphasis the Authority places on close collaboration with other public sector organisations. In this way, the Authority is able to bring about numerous genuinely effective improvements in outcomes (e.g. by working with a range of other North Wales organisations to identify and support vulnerable people) and in efficiency (e.g. by working with North Wales Police in the Joint Communications Centre, in managing our buildings and premises, and in tackling the problem of arson and deliberate fire setting).

The Authority is fully committed to increasing collaboration wherever it can. It is actively engaged in the work of the Local Service Boards in North Wales, and works very closely with the other two Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities. The National Issues Committee is an excellent recent example of the three Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities coming together to drive forward the collaborative agenda across Wales.

Since the Authority's inception in 1996 it has built up a good understanding of the risk profile and business needs in the area it covers. During that time it has overseen a welcome reduction in the number of fires in the area and a steady decline in the number of people being injured by fire.

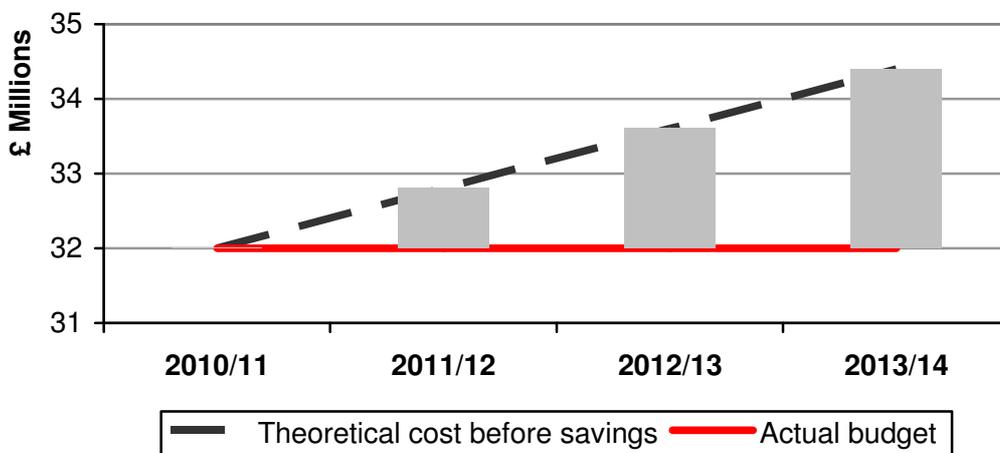
The challenge now is to maintain that record of success at a time of unprecedented challenges and potential demands on services. It is difficult to predict with absolute certainty the changes that will take place over the next decade, but it is possible to make a reasonable assessment of the likely pressures and move to alleviate those before they become too difficult to overcome.

We are committed to making North Wales a safer place to live, work and visit. We hope you will consider our proposals and let us know your views – whether you agree with them, or whether you can offer up better alternatives.

RECENT BACKGROUND

Savings made by the Authority

The national economic downturn and the outcomes of the Comprehensive Spending Review in November 2010 gave an indication of the level of cuts to public services that could be expected. Consequently, in December 2010, the Authority took the decision to freeze the annual budget available for running the Service at £32million for the next three years.



What this meant in real terms was that any cost increases that happened during those years (e.g. due to inflation or rises in fuel costs) would have to be paid for from within the existing budget: so every year around £800,000 would need to be taken away from some parts of the Service in order to pay for unavoidable cost increases. In total, by the end of the third year (2013/14), annual savings of £2.45million had to be achieved.

RECENT BACKGROUND

How were the savings achieved?

In 2011/12

- £200,000 released by taking a very detailed look at specific budget lines and agreeing that what had originally been planned should either be stopped altogether or scaled down.
- £50,000 cut from the Community Fire Safety budget.
- £90,000 cut from the Support Staff budget.
- £460,000 cut from the operational management budget by restructuring the Officer Cover arrangements.
- £30,000 cut from the Control budget by restructuring its staffing arrangements.

In 2012/13

- Individual budget lines were again cut or scaled down, releasing a further £150,000.
- Another £50,000 cut from the Community Fire Safety budget.
- Another £90,000 cut from the Support Staff budget.
- £500,000 released from the operational firefighters' pay budget by changing the way their shifts were rostered but without reducing the number of firefighters forming an emergency crew.

In 2013/14

- Individual budget lines were cut or scaled down for a third time, releasing a further £70,000.
- Another £50,000 cut from the Community Fire Safety budget.
- Another £180,000 cut from the Support Staff budget.
- A further £500,000 released from the operational firefighters' pay budget, by changing the way their shifts were rostered (as above).

THE AUTHORITY'S 2012 CONSULTATION

2013-14 Draft Proposals for Consultation

Last Autumn (2012) the Authority ran a public consultation on its draft Improvement Objectives for 2013-14.

What the Authority proposed for 2013-14 was:

A. to continue to pursue its two Improvement Objectives of:

1. preventing accidental dwelling fire deaths and injuries
2. reducing the Service's running costs

and in addition:

B. to undertake two new projects that would feed in to Authority's Improvement Objectives for 2014-15 by:

1. devising a 3-year financial plan for 2014/15 onwards
2. exploring alternative ways of providing fire and rescue services in North Wales.

The two new projects came about because the Authority's detailed assessment of the risks facing its future operations had indicated that it would need to prepare itself for threats in three areas:

- a rising demand for services;
- an increasingly unpredictable workload; and
- the effects of financially challenging times.

THE AUTHORITY'S 2012 CONSULTATION

2012 Consultation Response

The Authority received around 170 different comments, views and questions from the public consultation. The response was predominantly supportive of what it was proposing, with 74% of responses agreeing with its choice of priorities for 2013-14.

In the 2012 consultation, the Authority had outlined some of the difficulties it faced in maintaining fire cover in predominantly rural areas. In order to inform its future strategy, one question had asked the public to think about how they might react if they were forced to make a difficult choice between:

- a) keeping a fire station open because it was near to their home, but accepting that despite best efforts it was not going to be available for several hours a week, or
- b) having a fire station that was always ready to respond, but accepting that it was several miles further away from their home.

A clear majority (around two-thirds of the responses), said that if forced to choose they would prefer option b), but several were reluctant to accept that this sort of choice should have to be made.

A number of responses acknowledged the need to reduce costs, increase efficiency and reduce inefficiency, but not at the expense of 'front line services' which they felt should be protected above all else. Interestingly, the majority of the efficiency and cost-savings suggestions being put forward were things that the Authority had already tackled, such as reducing management and support costs (see page 7).

ACTIONS DURING 2013-14

2013-14 Planned Actions

Having considered the consultation responses, the Authority put its plans into action for achieving its Improvement Objectives during this current financial year.

In addition to reducing the budget by a further £800,000 (see previous section), the Authority has plans in place for this year to:

- deliver a Community Safety/Risk Reduction Strategy
- continuously monitor the incidence and causes of dwelling fires
- involve partner organisations in learning lessons from dwelling fires to reduce the likelihood of recurrence
- examine the factors that may contribute to making some people more vulnerable to fires than others, cross-referenced where appropriate to the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010
- review the Service's current arrangements with partner organisations for the delivery of home fire safety checks and referrals of particularly vulnerable people.
- monitor the Service's adherence to the commitments made through the new Dwelling Fires Response Charter.

More details about these actions and what measurable outputs and outcomes can be expected are contained in the Authority's Combined Improvement and Risk Reduction Plan 2013-14 that was published in March 2013.

THE AUTHORITY'S 2013 CONSULTATION

The Authority is now entering the next phase of its planning. The risks facing the Authority remain, and there are still some long-term challenges to address.

The Authority is proposing three Improvement Objectives for adoption in 2014-15.

The first Improvement Objective is carried over from previous years, reflecting the Authority's continuing commitment to the prevention of fire deaths and injuries.

The second Improvement Objective reflects a different approach to financing the Service as it comes to the end of a three-year budget freeze.

The third Improvement Objective reflects the Authority's recognition of the need to provide sustainable and affordable fire and rescue services in North Wales in the longer term.

THE AUTHORITY'S 2013 CONSULTATION

Proposed Improvement Objective 1

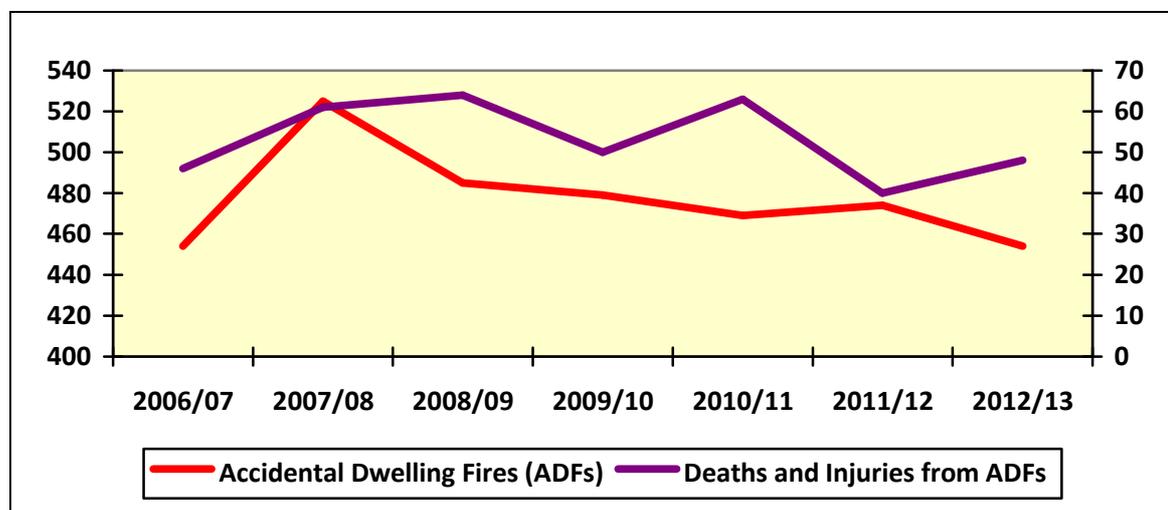
To help to keep people and communities safe by preventing deaths and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation.

Why is this being proposed?

Because keeping people safe is the Authority's primary concern, but also it makes better sense to prevent incidents from happening than to simply react every time they do.

Apart from the positive human impact of safer communities, they cost less too, because for every fire injury prevented there will be an associated cost saving in other areas of public service.

But despite some remarkable successes in reducing the overall incidence of fires in recent years, deaths and injuries in dwelling fires in North Wales remain a concern for the Authority.



For many years the Authority has been reminding people that prevention is better than cure, and it still believes that. The Authority is committed to keeping its annual target of delivering 30,000 Home Fire Safety Checks to householders in North Wales, but the demographics of North Wales and the identified behaviours mean that prevention activity may need to increase in order to keep pace.

THE AUTHORITY'S 2013 CONSULTATION

Proposed Improvement Objective 2

To implement a 3-year financial plan for 2014/15 to 2016/17 that funds the current level of service, but that aims to limit the cost of doing so to the equivalent of an extra £1 per year per head of population.

Why is this being proposed?

Since 2010/11, the budget has remained the same, and the Service running costs have fallen. This has been achieved through what can be termed 'internal' cutbacks, with very few noticeable changes on the outside. For the majority of service users, they will probably not have noticed much difference.

However, the point has now been reached where continuing to freeze the budget would have a very noticeable impact on the fire and rescue services provided in North Wales, which the Authority is not minded to pursue. This is why the Authority is proposing to change its approach for the period of its next 3-year budget plan.

The Authority is proposing to increase the annual budget by just enough to maintain the current level of service, with a safeguard that the level of annual increase should equate to no more than an additional £1 per year per head of population in North Wales.

THE AUTHORITY'S 2013 CONSULTATION

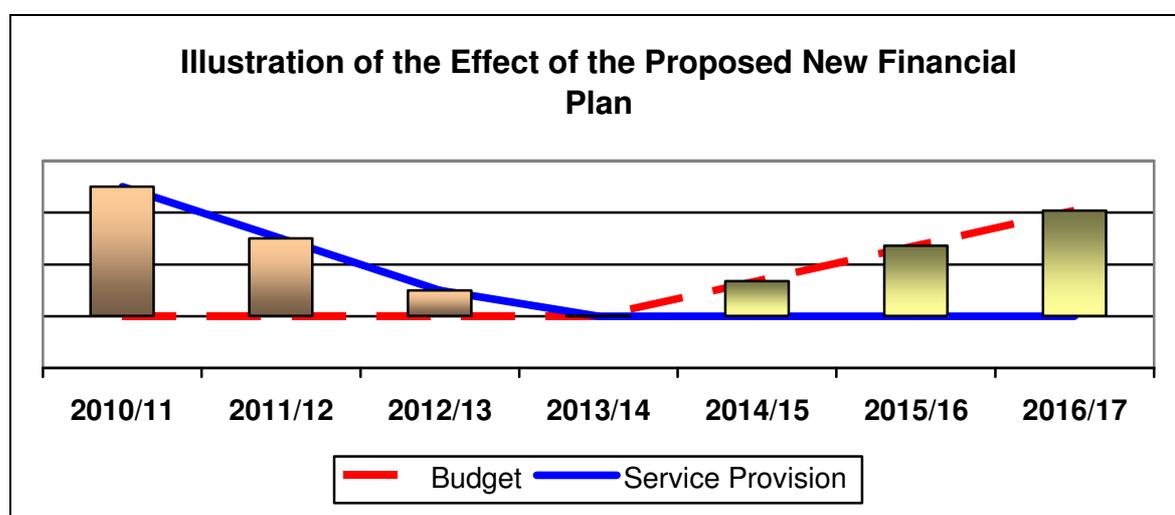
Theoretically, what would further cuts mean?

If the Authority did not make this increase, and decided instead to freeze the budget for another 3 years, this would mean reducing the Service's running costs by another £3.3million on top of the £2.45million already taken out over the period of the last 3-year financial plan.

- **To achieve £3.3million of savings would mean having to:**
- close 7 retained fire stations, and therefore permanently shed 100 firefighter posts **AND**
- remove one wholetime fire engine from service in Wrexham (the only fire station in North Wales that has two), and therefore permanently shed 28 firefighter posts **AND**
- remove the retained fire appliances and therefore permanently shed 100 firefighter posts from the wholetime fire stations in Holyhead, Caernarfon, Bangor, Llandudno, Colwyn Bay, Rhyl, Queensferry and Wrexham, leaving just one fire engine on each station.

Having kept the budget at the same level since 2010/11, the Service delivery costs have been reduced by £2.45million.

Going forward, the proposal is that the level of service should remain the same, even if it means increasing the budget slightly to fund that.



THE AUTHORITY'S 2013 CONSULTATION

How much would that add to the cost?

The Authority knows well that all public services are having to limit their spending, and that the fire and rescue service is not immune to the effects of such a harsh financial climate.

The additional budget for the Fire and Rescue Authority would come from the six county councils in North Wales. To this end, it is making an undertaking to aim to limit the extent of the budgetary impact on constituent authorities to a maximum equivalent of an additional £1 per year per head of population.

For information, according to figures published by the Welsh Government:

The budgeted revenue expenditure for North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority for 2013/14 equated to **£46 per head** of population¹.

The mid-year population estimate for North Wales in 2012/13 totalled 688,417 rising to a projected 698,664 by 2016/17².

¹ SDR 97/2013 Local Authority Budgeted Revenue Expenditure 2013-14, Table 2.
<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2013/130618-local-authority-budgeted-revenue-expenditure-2013-14-en.pdf>

² www.StatsWales.Wales.gov.uk Population projections by local authority and year.

THE AUTHORITY'S 2013 CONSULTATION

Proposed Improvement Objective 3

To ensure that North Wales gets the best possible level of service within financial constraints, use a variety of management solutions to optimise fire and rescue cover in the area.

Why is this being proposed?

In its public consultation last year, the Authority explained some of the difficulties of providing fire and rescue services in predominantly rural areas. In North Wales, the majority of fire stations are crewed exclusively by firefighters working the Retained Duty System (RDS), where crew members are paid an annual retainer and fees for attending incidents.

The vast majority of RDS staff are genuinely committed to the work, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract and retain staff who are able to both provide fire cover and hold down a full time job with their primary employer. This duty system suited previous generations very well as people generally stayed within their communities without travelling far for either work or leisure, and companies could afford to employ large numbers of staff. Now, however, primary employers are under pressure to operate with as few employees as possible, making it less likely that they can afford to allow their staff to leave their place of work to attend an emergency incident for the Fire and Rescue Service.

Members of the Service have been looking at different ways of providing fire and rescue services, and have visited a number of Fire and Rescue Services in other parts of the UK to see what alternatives are in operation elsewhere. The reports coming back have been mixed, with several new alternatives being simply too new to gauge the full implications of adopting them.

Taking long term sustainability and affordability of services as guiding principles, the Authority is proposing that this work of finding suitable alternative options for providing fire and rescue services in North Wales should continue to develop.

PLEASE TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We would like to encourage anyone with an interest in North Wales Fire and Rescue to tell us what they think about our proposed Improvement Objectives for 2014-15.

Please send your comments:

By Post to:

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
Ffordd Salesbury
St Asaph Business Park
St Asaph
Denbighshire, LL17 0JJ

By e-mail to:

futurefire@nwales-fireservice.org.uk

You can also visit

www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk

[@northwalesfire](https://twitter.com/northwalesfire) on Twitter

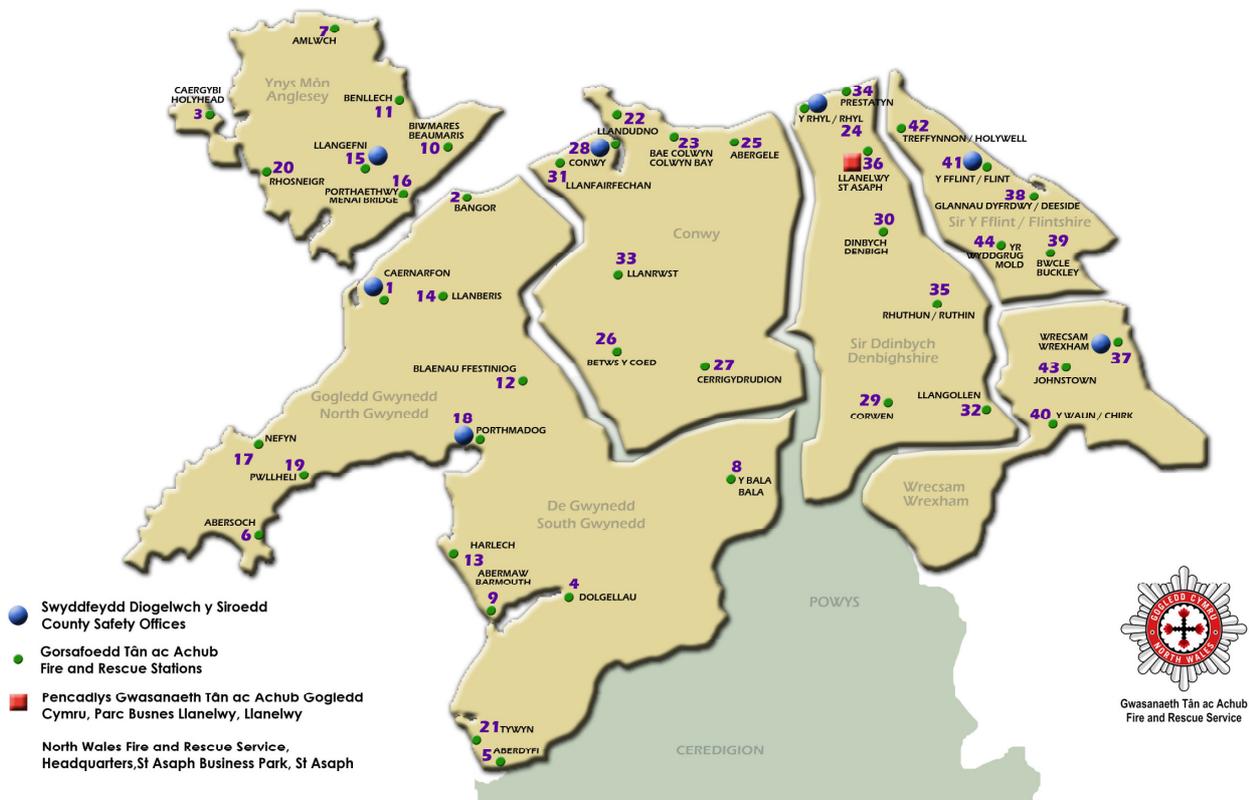
www.facebook.com/northwalesfireservice

APPENDICES

KEY INFORMATION ABOUT NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE

GWASANAETH TÂN AC ACHUB GOGLEDD CYMRU NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Lleoliad y Gorsafod / Station Locations



KEY INFORMATION ABOUT NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE

	2011-12	2012-13
Revenue budget	£31.933 million	£31.772 million
Grants received	£2.692 million	£2.299 million
Capital expenditure	£4.491 million	£2.865 million
Fire stations	44	44
Fire engines	54	54
People employed as at 31 March	983	900
Fires attended	3,165	2,349
Non-fire emergency incidents attended	990	1,204
False alarms attended	3,566	3,249
Home Fire Safety Checks delivered	28,472	22,201

More information is provided on our website, or alternatively you can contact us at the address given on the contents page.

REFERENCE

Useful external sources of information:

www.statswales.wales.gov.uk

<http://www.infobasecymru.net/IAS/>

Duties and Key Legislation

Fire and Rescue Authorities operate within a complex legislative and regulatory framework that includes:

- The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
- The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005
- The Civil Contingencies Act 2004
- The Local Government Measure 2009
- The Welsh Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012 Onwards

Financial contributions

Revenue spending is financed by contributions from the six constituent local authorities in proportion to their population. For 2012-13 and 2013-14 the proportions were:

Authority	Contribution 2012/13 £	Population Estimates 2013	2013/14 Contribution £	% Change
Conwy County Borough Council	5,206,959	112,988	5,198,570	-0.16%
Anglesey County Council	3,219,270	69,903	3,216,231	-0.09%
Gwynedd Council	5,525,827	119,713	5,507,985	-0.32%
Denbighshire County Council	4,569,316	99,840	4,593,630	+0.53%
Flintshire County Council	6,981,590	151,165	6,955,089	-0.38%
Wrexham County Borough Council	6,269,049	136,938	6,300,506	+0.50%
Total	31,772,011	690,547	31,772,011	

(Changes per unitary authority reflect changes in the population.)

REFERENCE

Spending plans for 2013-14:

	Budget 2012/13 £	Budget 2013/14 £
Employees	23,048,716	22,945,848
Premises	1,279,800	1,310,347
Transport	1,148,051	1,178,052
Supplies	3,009,194	2,979,346
Agency	319,000	322,000
Support Services	323,700	377,960
Capital Financing	2,923,050	2,946,623
Total	32,051,511	32,060,176
Income	-279,500	-288,185
Net expenditure	31,772,011	31,772,011

REFERENCE

Staffing

As at 31/03/2013	Posts	FTE	HC
Wholetime operational staff <i>74% of these posts are based on fire stations. The remainder are senior management posts and specialist posts including training and prevention work.</i>	242	254	254
Retained operational staff <i>All these posts are based on fire stations.</i>	557	406.5	467
Control staff <i>86% of these posts are entirely based in the control room. The remainder are middle and senior management posts including Control training and business continuity management.</i>	28	28.75	32
Non-operational staff <i>These posts cover a range of functions including fleet management, buildings maintenance, ICT, finance and payroll, training, human resources, corporate communications and administration. 31% are in fire safety and community fire safety.</i>	145.57	137.42	147
Totals	972.57	826.67	900

FTE = Full Time Equivalent HC = Headcount of employees

Staff sickness and injuries

In 2012/13:

- A total of 1,267 days or shifts were lost due to short term sickness absence, and 3,263 days or shifts were lost due to long term sickness absence. This equates to 10.5 days or shifts per person (excluding Retained Duty System staff.)
- There were 7 ill-health retirements during the year.
- 29 firefighters were injured at operational incidents. None received fatal injuries or major injuries reportable under RIDDOR. These 29 (total) injuries accounted for a total of 559 normal duty days being lost to sickness absence.

REFERENCE

Fire Stations

There are 44 fire stations in North Wales.

- 3 wholetime shift stations
- 5 day crewed stations
- 36 retained stations

Fire appliances

There is one retained fire appliance and crew at every fire station except Pwllheli where there are two (45).

There is also one wholetime fire appliance in each wholetime shift and day crewed station, except Wrexham where there are two (9).

Activity levels

In 2012/13 the service:

- Handled 15,740 calls for assistance of which 6,802 required an attendance.
- Attended 2,349 fires, 1,204 non-fire emergencies and 3,249 false alarms.
- Delivered 22,201 Home Fire Safety Checks, gave 525 safety talks in schools and 8 elsewhere, and attended 17 publicity events.
- Conducted 867 fire safety audits of premises.
- Extricated people from vehicles at 74 incidents.

Quality of service

In 2012/13 the service:

- Attended 15% of all primary fires in less than 5 minutes, 51% between 5 and 10 minutes, 23% between 10 and 15 minutes and 11% in over 15 minutes.
- Attended 19% of all dwelling fires in less than 5 minutes, 50% between 5 and 10 minutes, 21% between 10 and 15 minutes and 10% in over 15 minutes.
- Delivered 7,742 home fire safety checks to particularly vulnerable people, these having been specifically arranged following a referral from one of our partner organisations.
- Recorded that 91% of accidental dwelling fires were confined to the room where the fire started.

REFERENCE

Outcomes

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Fires	3,289	3,156	2,349
Primary fires	1,346	1,296	1,143
Dwelling fires	535	530	493
Non-domestic fires	229	215	147
Secondary fires	1,623	1,609	887
Fire deaths	10	8	8
Fire injuries	97	64	60