

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	16 September 2019
Lead Officer	Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Chief Fire Officer (01745) 535253
Subject	Governance and Finance Arrangements for Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To update Members on the latest position regarding proposed changes to the finance and governance arrangements for fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) in Wales.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 Following the Welsh Government's White Paper consultation on reforming the finance and governance arrangements of Welsh FRAs, Hannah Blythyn AM, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government has now issued a statement confirming that two of the proposals in the White Paper will not be pursued, but that she will make a further statement on this matter in the autumn.

RECOMMENDATION

- 3 That Members note the contents of this update and receive further information once the Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government has made a further statement on this matter.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 4 The latest information has not been considered by either the Executive Panel or the Audit Committee.

BACKGROUND

- 5 Members were informed in December 2018 that the Welsh Government had published a White Paper on the "Reform of Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales" inviting responses by 5 February 2019 to the proposals within it regarding changes to the governance and finance arrangements of FRAs.
- 6 A workshop was convened on 15 January 2019 so that Members could discuss the contents of the White Paper and contribute to the Authority's formal response which was subsequently approved and submitted by the deadline.

- 7 At a meeting on 20 February 2019, Hannah Blythyn AM, Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government, advised the Chair and the Chief Fire Officer that the White Paper consultation had generated a significant number of responses (over 60) but that once those responses had been analysed, the Welsh Government would publish a response.
- 8 The Chief Fire Officer confirmed to Members on 17 June 2019 that this issue had not progressed because that response had not yet been published.

INFORMATION

- 9 On 18 July 2019 the Welsh Government published fifty-nine of the sixty responses to its White Paper consultation, together with a summary analysis of the responses.
- 10 This analysis noted that, "...most responses supported the broad case for change, although the FRAs themselves generally did not. However, and with a few exceptions, there was less consensus about the detailed proposals." It also confirmed that the Welsh Government "...remains committed to reform, and is considering the shape of that in light of this consultation."
- 11 Hannah Blythyn AM also issued a progress report on the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services on 18 July 2019, including information about the consultation on the White Paper.
- 12 This report reiterated the Welsh Government's commitment in principle to reform, but confirmed that the proposals to a) draw FRA members from council cabinets and b) require FRAs to agree their budgets with local authorities will not now be pursued, describing them as being "the two proposals about which the FRAs had the greatest reservations". The Minister further stated that she planned to visit each FRA over the summer, reflect further on the direction that any reform would take, and make a further statement in the autumn.

IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	None at this time.
Budget	Change to the Authority's finance and governance arrangements has the potential to affect the Authority's budget position in the future. Any legal advice that may be sought is not budgeted for at this time.
Legal	There are potential legal issues around amendments to, or repeal of, The North Wales Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1995. Legal advice may need to be sought at a future date.
Staffing	None at this time.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	None at this time.
Risks	There is the potential for any change to the Authority's finance and governance arrangements to affect its ability to deliver appropriate services to the North Wales community, particularly if the budget position is negatively affected.