



AGENDA ITEM: 9

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

21st September 2006

BEECHAM REPORT

Report by Ian Miller,
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Purpose of Report

1. To note the main recommendations of the Beecham report and to consider what steps the Fire Authority might take in response.

Background

2. The Welsh Assembly Government has a vision of a Welsh Public Service that shares common goals and works across functional and organisational boundaries. Its mission is to reform the public services in Wales to make them more citizen focused, responsive to the needs of communities, driven by a commitment to equality and social justice and to deliver efficiency.

This vision was communicated in 2004 through a document called **Making the Connections** which outlines four main principles:

- **Citizens at the Centre:** services more responsive to users with people and communities involved in designing the way services are delivered



Background *(continued)*

- **Equality and Social Justice:** every person to have the opportunity to contribute and public services will reach out to those hardest to reach
 - **Working together as the Welsh Public Service:** more co-ordination between providers to deliver sustainable, quality and responsive services
 - **Value for Money:** making the most of our resources
3. As part of the action plan for implementing its **Making the Connections** strategy the Welsh Assembly Government established the **Beecham Review** in July 2005. The aims of the review were to identify improvements in the arrangements for local service delivery, which are as radical and innovative as necessary and to examine how existing arrangements for accountability can be used, developed and adapted to support this innovation.
4. On the 10th July Sir Jeremy Beecham presented his report "**Beyond Boundaries**" to the Welsh Assembly Government's Finance and Public Services Minister. The report establishes common principles for citizen-centred, efficient and accountable services in a small country. The review recommends:-
- reducing bureaucracy
 - much more joint working
 - no major re-organisation of authorities although progress will be reviewed in five years
 - a willingness to embrace a mixed economy of provision including the public private and not for profit sectors
 - an enhanced role for scrutiny in the Assembly and local government
 - greater investment in building capacity and skills in service delivery



Background *(continued)*

- piloting Partnership Action Contracts (contracts between the Assembly Government and partnerships to achieve specific objectives)
- managing performance better
- according redress where service failure occurs
- ensuring the public and decision makers are better informed about performance.

The full report may be seen at:

<http://new.wales.gov.uk/about/strategy/makingtheconnections/beechemreview/echamrep?lang=en>

5. When presenting the report Sir Jeremy said that “our message is that Making the Connections has made a promising start, but like modern broadband technology, it has to go **further and faster**”.

Progress so far in North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

6. There is a growing track record of collaboration, particularly with other emergency services. Examples include the joint property unit located in North Wales Police, the forthcoming co-responder pilot in parts of Gwynedd, the arson reduction team and the proposed tri-service control room. These initiatives seek outcomes such as improved service to the public, increased capacity or resilience or efficiency savings.
7. The modernisation process in fire and rescue authorities has required attention to some of the issues that also feature in the Beecham report: a good example is engagement with the public through improved communications, community fire safety work and risk reduction plans (and before that integrated risk management plans).



Progress so far in North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority *(continued)*

8. However the Beecham report sets a challenging agenda that will require further consideration of improvements in areas such as implementing the citizen model of public service delivery; being strong on delivery; ensuring partnership working delivers tangible benefits for citizens; enhancing challenge, both internal scrutiny but also externally, for example perhaps through councils' scrutiny committees; enhancing capacity; and demonstrating a strategic approach to efficiency.
9. The requirement for a continuous focus on efficiency does not arise solely from the principle that modernisation is meant to be self-funding but also because of the tightening position on public finances. The Beecham report together with the Making the Connections agenda focus on the cost effective delivery of services. To encourage this approach the Assembly assumes local government will reduce service costs through improved efficiency and accordingly assume 1% efficiency savings each year as part of the funding to councils. This will continue until 2009/10 when a significant cumulative saving in service delivery costs is anticipated. This scenario means that the authority must always be seeking to improve cost effectiveness and identify income generation opportunities.

Recommendations

10. The Executive Panel is invited to note the main recommendations of the Beecham report and to consider what steps the Fire Authority might take in response.