



AGENDA ITEM: 13

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY AUDIT COMMITTEE

6 June 2016

IMPROVEMENT PLANNING WORKING GROUP PROGRESS REPORT

Report by Dawn Docx, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To inform Members of the progress of the Improvement Planning Working Group.

Background

2. North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (NWFRA) is required under the Local Government Measure 2009 to carry out improvement planning, and will need to have published its improvement objectives for 2017/18 by 31 March 2017.
3. Improvement objectives must be consistent with at least one of seven defined elements of improvement. NWFRA must set improvement objectives every year, but this does not mean that the objectives have to change every year or be deliverable within one year.
4. NWFRA is also subject to the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015, which requires it to carry out sustainable development, and set and publish its first well-being objectives by 31 March 2017.
5. The Authority's well-being objectives must be designed to maximise its contribution to achieving each of seven defined well-being goals.

6. Issued statutory guidance promotes integrating sustainable development into other aspects of corporate planning so that public bodies do not treat the requirement to set well-being objectives as separate from the requirement to set other objectives for the organisation.
7. NWFRA's Improvement Planning Working Group (IPWG) has met on four occasions this year (22 February, 14 March, 11 April, 25 April) to develop improvement and well-being objectives for 2017/18.

Information

8. During the IPWG meetings members received presentations and information on NWFRA's medium term financial outlook, and considered a range of possible options for continuing to provide affordable fire and rescue services.
9. Members considered the savings and service improvements that NWFRA has already achieved, and the agreed projects and strategies that have yet to be implemented; but also recognised that with a funding gap of £1.7million by 2018/19 and diminishing financial reserves steps will need to be taken to help ensure the sustainability of services.
10. In considering the anticipated financial pressures and a range of costed options to meet those pressures, members remained mindful of the impact that reducing budgets could have on core services, public safety, staffing levels and maintaining good industrial relations.
11. Although sympathetic to the financial pressures facing the majority of public services, members reflected on the unavoidable cost pressures which NWFRA will have to face over the next three years due to pay and price inflation and changing government policy around pensions.
12. Members therefore recognised that NWFRA's existing improvement objective around a medium term financial plan in which freezing the budget is a central principle would not be sustainable.

13. Consequently, members recognised that this financial strategy would need to be replaced by one that combines three aspects: using its financial reserves; increasing contributions from the constituent authorities; and making service reductions. This new three-year strategy would see the Authority through to 2019/20, and would include maintaining a frozen budget in the last two of those three years.
14. In terms of service reductions, Members recognised that any such reduction in service delivery would inevitably take time to implement and therefore would need to be planned to come into effect by 2019/20.
15. As for NWFRA's other three existing improvement objectives, Members saw no reason to change these, and propose that these should continue into the next financial year.
16. The four improvement and well-being objectives for 2017/18 being proposed by the IPWG are therefore:
 - (i) To help to keep people and communities safe by preventing deaths and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation.
 - (ii) (NEW) The Authority will adopt a three-year financial strategy that combines the use of reserves, an increase in financial contributions and service reductions.
 - (iii) The Authority will re-balance its resources to match risk. It will implement a new model of resourcing which ensures the availability of at least 20 strategically located fire crews in North Wales at times of relatively lower risk, and at least 38 at times of relatively higher risk.
 - (iv) The Authority will explore opportunities to diversify the role of the firefighter and offer additional services to the public of North Wales.

Recommendation

- 9 That Members note the progress of the Improvement Planning Working Group.