

## **Welsh Fire Services' National Issues Committee (NIC)**

### **Purpose**

For discussion.

### **Summary**

The Welsh Fire and Rescue Services' National Issues Committee (NIC) was established in 2012 to further improve collaborative working, service delivery and sustained service improvement amongst the three FRSs in Wales. Richard Smith, Chief Fire Officer of Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service will attend to talk about the work of the Committee and share lessons more widely.

The NIC has been established with clear aims and objectives along with the appropriate powers to deliver on these objectives. The combined Fire and Rescue Authorities of Mid and West Wales, North Wales and South Wales make up the NIC.

### **Recommendation**

That members of the Fire Commission receive the presentation for information and discussion.

### **Action**

Officers to progress as directed.

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### **Background**

#### **The Welsh context**

1. It is widely acknowledged that the Welsh Government has established for Wales a distinctly different policy agenda to that of the rest of the UK. This was supported in 2006 with the publication of the Beecham Review, which clearly identified the need for a strong citizen focus and a continued emphasis on the need for a broad range of organisations to work collaboratively. Public spending reductions are not the only driver for change. Public services, including the FRAs, work within increasingly complex environments with diverse pressures such as changing demographics, increasing diverse society with varying needs, rising citizen expectations, changing family structures and entrenched socio-economic inequalities.

#### **Changes in Government policy**

2. The Welsh Fire Services' National Issues Committee was set up following several key developments in Welsh Government policy towards greater collaboration:
  - 2.1 The **Wales Programme for Government 2011** detailed the Government's vision for the future of Wales across a range of outcomes for local people, including lower levels of poverty and greater equality, healthy people living productive lives in a more prosperous and innovative economy, a resilient environment with more sustainable use of our natural resources and safer and more cohesive communities.
  - 2.2 The **Fire and Rescue Services Framework 2012** identifies expectations placed upon the FRAs to work effectively and efficiently through collaboration to deliver the Programme for Government.
  - 2.3 The **Efficiency and Innovations Board**, established in 2010 was set up to transform the way that public services are designed and delivered and to promote collaboration. Strands of the Efficiency and Innovation programme include: Collaborative procurement, improved asset management, a single ICT Strategy for Wales, new service delivery models for common services and joint workforce development.
  - 2.4 The **Simpson Compact** is a key commitment to democratic accountability within the Welsh Government's Programme for Government, with elected members and professional officers working in collaboration across administrative boundaries. One of the keys issues will be active and coordinated political leadership. Local government leaders need to create the culture for the change. Equally the Welsh Government needs to provide the strategic context and the end point of such.
  - 2.5 The **Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009** provides the Minister with new powers in relation to directing collaboration between Improvement Authorities to

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work together to identify and share best practice more easily; increase the proportion of resources directed at the frontline while reducing the overall burden of administration; and realise economies of scale. The Measure provides a vital enabling power to remove any statutory or other obstacle to Improvement Authorities collaborating.

**The National Issues Committee**

3. The aim of the NIC is to:
  - 3.1 Develop and implement improved arrangements for the strategic and co-ordinated delivery of collaborative work where service improvements and efficiencies are realised. These will deliver National outcomes without compromising the independence of the constituent Fire and Rescue Authorities to make local decisions to meet local needs.
  - 3.2 Without compromising local autonomy and identity, optimise collaborative working to identify savings, efficiencies and economic benefits, keeping the communities of Wales safe and the Authorities able to meet the prevailing economic challenges.
  - 3.3 Realise the benefits derived from collaborative working and to enhance Welsh resilience, operational effectiveness and safety of the community whilst at the same time balancing local budgets.

**The NIC in practice**

Two examples of the NIC's work are set out below:

**i. Resilience Plans**

4. Operational service delivery accounts for the largest element of total spend on Fire and Rescue in Wales. The NIC provides FRA with an unprecedented opportunity to determine the potential for savings on an all-Wales basis whilst still maintaining optimum levels of provision.
5. This project focuses on front line operational service delivery across the Welsh FRS. The NIC's starting point was to gather baseline data and develop a position statement on where opportunities exist for wider collaboration. A number of specific working groups have been set up with representatives from each of the three Services; their remit is not only to identify where the three Services differ, but also to challenge why and to develop innovative delivery systems. This work includes working across boundaries with key stakeholders such as the police and ambulance to identify which functions can be delivered on a national, regional and local basis and hence where savings can be achieved.
6. Collaboration is nothing new to the FRS's in Wales; however it must be stressed that developing strong working relationships with peers, building trust and mutual respect leads to a common focus which in the case of the NIC is "working together for a safer

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Wales". Inevitably there are occasions where compromise has to be reached for the benefit of the whole and it is in times like these that strong working relationships come to the fore, keeping the focus on the longer-term sustainable improvement of the FRS.

**ii. National Procurement**

7. The agreement of the NIC to the Interim All Wales Procurement Strategy gives Procurement teams authority to guide service areas in a consistent manner, in line with best practice, and across Wales. This was the first of a number of advances which have helped to develop a streamlined, effective and professional all Wales procurement process.
8. The main focus for the procurement work-stream has been the alignment of contracts and an all-Wales collaborative contracts plan has now been developed and the three Services are taking it in turns to lead on contracts, depending on skills. This is leading to both economies of scale associated with greater purchasing power and efficient use of staff resources, avoiding duplication not only within the procurement teams but also within the service areas. Use of the e-tendering system has led to savings of between £6k and £12k per procurement.
9. Initial challenges facing the project team were the different operating systems used between the three Services. The National Collaborative Procurement project team, made up of all three Services meet on a regular basis and this has led to stronger working relationships. All three also still have their own local collaborations with other public bodies where these are the best solution, and use or set up Welsh and UK national frameworks where appropriate.

**Next steps for the NIC**

10. A 2013 Welsh Audit Office review suggested there was clear evidence that administrative arrangements, such as work plan delegation to support the NIC are effective and the business case to support collaboration is sound and supported by the three Fire and Rescue Authorities. All the Partners are committed to collaboration and Authority members from differing political backgrounds have proved that they can work together for a common good across Wales. There is also a shared understanding that effective collaboration needs to be demonstrated in order to deliver against the demands facing the FRS now and in the future.
11. Future learning points for the programme as a whole included:
  - 11.1 prioritising the Committee's Forward Work Programme of 48 individual workstreams to give greater focus and ensure ambition is matched by resources available;
  - 11.2 enhancing the project's performance management system, with the inclusion of clear success factors, milestones and standard measurement systems; and
  - 11.3 aligning each of the individual Fire and Rescue Services' strategic plans with that of the NIC, ensuring actions can be resourced and accounted for; and continuing

to ensure strong leadership and building good working relationships and trust between all stakeholders. The WAO review confirmed the commitment shown at senior level by reporting that the right people are around the table.

12. Further information regarding the programme and its progress to date, as well as other case study learning examples can be found in the NIC annual report [here](#).