

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 25 NOVEMBER 2014**

REPORT BY: **CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

SUBJECT: **CONSULTATION ON THE LEVEL OF FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES BY THE NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY YOUR SERVICES, YOUR CHOICES**

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To invite the Council to make a response to the consultation document of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service *Your Services, Your Choices*. The deadline is 9th January 2015.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority has opened a public consultation on the options for the future of fire and rescue services across North Wales, both preventative and responsive services, in a climate of national budget reductions for all public services.

2.02 The Council met in informal session on 9 September to hear a presentation from the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer on the options for the future prior to the publication of the formal consultation document. This session also included a question and answer session. Councillors will therefore be familiar with the background and the risks of the three options.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 The North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority has been through phases of efficiencies and cost reduction in recent years to avoid seeking increases in its levy. The levy is the charge made to the six constituent councils as a share of Council Tax income. The Authority also receives specific grants from Welsh Government. The Authority has reached a position where further budget reductions will require a review of the fire and rescue station cover across the region and the preventative community safety services. The consultation document *Your Services, Your Choices* sets out the funding arrangements of the Authority and its regional network of responsive and preventative services in more detail.

3.02 The consultation paper outlines three options for the future. The first is a continued 'freeze' in the Authority's annual budget. The second is

a reduction in the Authority's annual budget at a level similar to the reductions being felt by the constituent councils themselves. The third is a gradual increase in the Authority's budget to protect services.

3.03 Council is invited to review the options, and the risks and benefits of each one, and provide feedback. One of the purposes of the previous informal Council session was for senior officers of the Fire and Rescue Service to demonstrate how the Authority had maximised the opportunities for making cost efficiencies, and to evidence that there was no scope for further efficiencies as an option to reviewing station fire cover and 'front line' and preventative services if its budgets were to reduce further.

3.04 The Council is represented on the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority by six councillors alongside twenty-two councillors from the other five constituent councils in the region. The Authority will need to take into full account the outcomes of the consultation in passing its annual budget for 2015-16 alongside risk assessing the implications for public safety of the two reductive options for its annual budget. The members of the Authority will have a duty to act in the best interests of the Fire and Rescue Authority in passing judgement on the budget options.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

4.01 Council is invited to review the three options within the consultation paper and provide feedback.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.01 Any upward variation in the levy payable to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority would have an impact on the Council. The levy is paid to the Authority from the Council Tax. Any increase in the levy would therefore be a cost to be included within the annual increase in the total Council Tax amount payable by local households and would reduce the 'headroom' for the Council to raise Council Tax, within acceptable limits, to fund its own services.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

6.01 The North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority provides services for vulnerable people through its community safety and preventative programmes. These services are under budget pressure and may not be able to be sustained at the current level in future years.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 None directly.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 As 6.01 above.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 None directly.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 None further at this stage.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 This report is presented as part of the public consultation opened by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 The public consultation document published by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service *Your Services, Your Choices*.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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