



AGENDA ITEM: 10

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY EXECUTIVE PANEL

13 February 2017

WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARDS COMPLIANCE

Report by Richard Fairhead, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

Purpose of Report

- 1 To provide an update on progress with the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service Welsh Language Monitoring report 2015-16 and a briefing in relation to compliance with the Welsh Language Standards.

Background

- 2 Each year, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service is required to produce a detailed report which sets out progress made towards meeting the targets outlined in the Service's Welsh Language Scheme. This is submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner under the arrangements as a result of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.
- 3 The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 sets the legal framework in place in order to introduce duties whereby organisations comply with statutory standards relating to the Welsh language.
- 4 In September 2017, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, along with other fire and rescue services and police forces in Wales, received official notice of the new Welsh Language Standards with which it will now be required to comply. Regulated by the Welsh Language Commissioner, these standards will come into force on 30 March 2017 and replace the previous system of Welsh language schemes.

Information

- 5 Once again, this was a period in which North Wales Fire and Rescue Service has achieved considerable progress in relation to the Welsh language. Key positive findings noted in the Annual Monitoring Report for 2015-16 include;
- despite a further reduction in the size of its workforce, the proportion of staff whose Welsh speaking skills meet the designated standard has increased significantly during the year. At the same time the proportion of staff who do not meet the required skills or remain at minimal levels has continued to decline.
 - the percentage of staff achieving at least the minimum level of skills (Level 2 or above) continues to increase – and the number of postholders with higher level skills also continues to increase.
 - there has been a considerable increase in compliance with Welsh language requirements for all posts in 2016.
 - encouragingly, following a concerted awareness raising campaign on social media and at events, there has been a slight improvement in the number of Home Safety Checks conducted through the medium of Welsh which had previously declined year on year in the previous three years.
 - the number of school presentations conducted in Welsh has increased significantly.
- 6 The Service's Welsh Language Scheme stipulates the requirement for all new members of staff and those successful in promotion to learn basic conversational Welsh to Level 2 standard in our CD programme and this has continued to be promoted successfully amongst staff during 2015-16. The Service continues to support members of staff who wish to attend courses in their local community rather than internal courses and supports Developing Welsh Language Skills for Managers training.
- 7 The Monitoring Report also highlights the work carried out in relation to promoting Welsh within the workplace as well as providing a bilingual service to the public. This includes the Service's continued commitment to identifying and supporting Welsh Language Champions across the region who continue to mentor others and receive guidance and support to help promote the language and facilitate learning.

- 8 Executive Panel members approved the Annual Monitoring Report 2015-16 at the meeting last July and it was submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner. The Commissioner subsequently requested further information on a number of specific aspects of the work detailed in the report, and this was provided in detail to the Commissioner's satisfaction.
- 9 The Service is now working towards meeting the requirements of the new standards which will come into force on 30 March 2017, and is doing so in collaboration with the other two Welsh fire and rescue services whilst also sharing best practice with North Wales Police and the Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust. Many of the standards specify requirements with which the Service is already in compliance.
- 10 In January 2017, the 'Get Ready!' Campaign was launched and highlighted across the Service, with the aim of raising awareness and informing staffing exactly what the responsibilities are in relation to the standards. Heads of department have been working as part of the Service's Welsh Language Forum to prepare for complying with the standards.
- 11 Details of the standards specific to North Wales Fire and Rescue Service can be found on the website www.nwales-fireservice.org.uk.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12 That Members note:
 - (i) the progress made in relation to the Service's Annual Monitoring Report 2015-16 and its commitment to ensuring the Service continues to promote the Welsh language and monitor progress in this area;
 - (ii) that preparations are in hand for meeting the requirements of the new Welsh Language Standards which will come into force in March 2017.