

Delivering better with fewer resources

How the Fire and Rescue Services are collaborating to improve service delivery



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All Wales' Fire and Rescue Services on exercise in Bala

Overview

The three Fire and Rescue Services across Wales are building on their proud history of collaboration to improve service delivery whilst identifying opportunities to reduce costs.

Background

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 for the three fire services in Wales: North Wales, Mid and West Wales and South Wales. The aim is to optimise collaborative working to support improvements in service delivery, whilst identifying savings, efficiencies and economic benefits. Keeping the communities of Wales safe and the services able to meet the prevailing economic challenges is at the heart of the NIC. The Welsh Fire and Rescue Services employ 4220 people and operate from over 140 fire and rescue stations.

Results

Identify outcomes that increase the wellbeing of Wales

Evidence

Make decisions using better information

Collaboration

Work with others across boundaries

Long term

Fix the causes rather than the symptoms

Connect

Focus on the economic, social and environmental benefits

Transparency

Measure and report on the difference you make

This is one of a series of SD stories that can be found on the Welsh Government website at <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/sustainabledevelopment/>

Why

The Welsh Fire and Rescue Services, in line with government direction, and building on previous and extensive collaborative successes adopted a new collaborative approach to meet the growing challenge of shrinking budgets, greater public and government service demands.

This pressure prompted the three Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities to focus on the long term sustainable delivery of the Service in Wales and how best to deliver an improved service with reducing budgets over the next 5-10 years.

Recognising the Welsh Government's agenda of greater collaboration the National Issues Committee was established. This landscape was influenced by, such reports as the Simpson report 'Local, Regional, National: What services are best delivered where?', which promoted collaboration as an effective approach to public sector service delivery, and the Programme for Government.

What they did

After the decision was made to enhance collaboration, the three Fire and Rescue Services reviewed existing collaborations, noting the partners, key aims, objectives and duration of each collaborative venture. This was a significant piece of work, which captured the details of each of the collaborations at local, regional and national levels, this identified 224 collaborations.

The National Issues Committee was then established to give an overarching strategic direction for collaboration, and has identified six key collaborative areas:

1. National control arrangements
2. Operations and resilience
3. National collaborative procurement
4. National training and development
5. Human resource functions
6. Common and specialist services (including transport and ICT)

Outcomes have been identified for each of these areas, and a standardised quality assurance process is applied with a project manager assigned to lead each work area.

The NIC is organised through a committee consisting of Elected Members, Chairpersons and Deputy Chairpersons of the three Fire and Rescue Authorities, and the three Chief Fire Officers and Deputy Chief Fire Officers. The committee is established as a structured voluntary arrangement rather than legislatively based. The day to day coordination of the forward work plan is the responsibility of the seconded Programme Coordinator Steve Rossiter.

The six key collaborative areas have identified 48 separate work streams, including;

- Joining up HR services such as payroll
- Reciprocal training between the Services
- Collective purchasing and management of fleet transport.

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What changed

Collaboration has brought distinct benefits and the establishment of the NIC has created longevity and a common direction to the Fire and Rescue Services' approach by giving a platform to formalise their existing partnerships. This

brought about a common approach across Wales to deliver greater efficiency in all elements of service, whether that be vehicle contracts, legal advice, energy procurement, or any other aspect of their operations.

Changes to the Fire and Rescue Services' light vehicle contract and their pumping appliances will have saved around £2.5 million in terms of cost avoidance, through collaboration and economies of scale, over a period of 5 years.

Through other work streams such as in the control room, where the use of Direct Electronic Information Transfer (DIET) have released over 3000 work hours. The saving is through innovative use of electronic systems to transfer information between emergency services, removing the need to physically telephone each other.

Standardising procedures and research and development has led to a wider base of people contributing to the evaluation of kit, equipment and service delivery and a better all round understanding of the service. With this comes a consistent approach across Wales, allowing for greater opportunities such as joint training, purchasing and communications.

"I'm now getting emails from people I have never met asking my view on a number of different aspects such as research and development and the purchasing of equipment, and who they need to speak to. It shows people are now starting to think collaboratively".

Steve Rossiter

National Issues Committee Project Coordinator

What obstacles existed

Successful collaboration requires a foundation built on trust and mutual respect, setting up project teams, working groups of staff from all three services has allowed these relationships to flourish.

Regular meetings and communications has helped develop shared understanding and trust between the services.

Working collaboratively across large geographical areas is also not that easy. For example, the Services have different ICT systems, which mean that talking to each other is not as easy as it could be. Aligning these systems will take time but the NIC are committed to it. The sheer scale of the work programme is another area the NIC have had to balance. There is still a need to deliver day to day services and with 48 pieces of work happening under the forward work programme, which has been careful to align work streams with what is already happening collaboratively so there is little duplication.

Long term the work the NIC is doing will become embedded within the organisations so that looking at reducing waste, preventing duplication, using resources effectively at an all Wales level will be part of the day job for the three Fire and Rescue Services in Wales.

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What they learned

Through the collaboration the NIC has learnt that patience, trust, passion and focus are essential to make it work.

Senior management direction and leadership is also key to ensuring things get done. Senior managers of the Fire and Rescue Authorities have embraced the National Issues Committee and realised that to deliver a Fire and Rescue Service in 10 years time things must be done differently.

Thinking about long term sustainable improvement and being patient is something the NIC have learned already.

The NIC has also worked because of its focus on outcomes with clear work boundaries; making sure people are responsible for different work streams and designing the service from the user and community perspective. Going forward, community engagement is an area the Fire and Rescue Service is working on, to provide more feedback and understanding of the needs of Welsh communities.

Perhaps most importantly the NIC has been able to deliver because of trust, professional relationships, and good communication. NIC programme co-ordinator Steve Rossiter has travelled across Wales giving presentations and ensuring people understand its purpose.

“At the beginning there was an emphasis on saving money, we’ve learnt through experience that saving money is important, but not at the detriment of improving service delivery. Taking time to get the right baseline information allows us to focus on where we want to be in the future and where opportunities exist that allow service improvements and efficiencies.”

Steve Rossiter

National Issues Committee Project Coordinator

Contact and Links

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National Issues Committee
Simpson Report

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