

Emergency service

Introduction

The responsibility of providing fire and rescue and ambulance services in Wales is devolved. The provision of emergency policing services remains a Home Office responsibility and is not devolved. Sea and coastal emergencies are the responsibility of the UK wide Maritime and Coastguard Agency. Emergency services are also provided in Wales by voluntary organisations such as mountain rescue teams, the Wales Air Ambulance and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI).

The Ambulance Service

The Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust was established on 1 April 1998, has 2,500 staff and operates 223 emergency vehicles and 254 other ambulance vehicles. 1.7 million patient journeys were made by ambulance in 2005-06ⁱ

On 20 June 2006 the National Assembly for Wales voted in favour of a motion calling for an inquiry to be held into the provision of ambulance services in Wales. In July 2006, the Auditor General for Wales, Jeremy Colman, was invited to conduct this inquiry which came about as a result of what the Auditor General's Report describes as, "growing and widespread public concern" about recent events in the Trust, including its consistent failure to achieve performance targets and high profile procurement failures. The Auditor General published his report on 4 December 2006ⁱⁱ. It made 28 recommendations grouped under 7 themes: performance; strategy; governance; leadership; people and culture; process; capacity, systems and infrastructure.

Since the appointment of the new Chief Executive, Alan Murray, the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust has been developing a comprehensive modernisation plan *Time to Make a Difference*ⁱⁱⁱ, designed to address a range of organisational challenges.

The consultation on a policy for Delivering Emergency Care Service (DECS) was announced by the Minister for Health and Social Services on 13 July 2006^{iv} and ran until 10 October 2006. The consultation addressed a number of issues including the need to ensure that NHS Direct, the Ambulance Trust, Out of Hours services and Minor Injury Units have the necessary capacity. A final policy document has not yet been published.

The Fire and Rescue Service

The Welsh Fire and Rescue Services attended around 42,900 fires and false alarms in 2005, a decrease of 6 per cent on 2004^v. There are three Fire and Rescue Service authorities in Wales - North Wales, Mid and West Wales and South Wales - which are aligned with local authority boundaries. Welsh Fire and Rescue Service Circulars and statistics are available on the Assembly Government website: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/fire/?lang=en>

The Police Forces of Wales

There are 4 Police Forces in Wales - North Wales, Dyfed Powys, South Wales and Gwent - which are aligned with local authority boundaries. The Social Justice and Regeneration Committee of the Second Assembly undertook two policy reviews^{vi} in response to the HMIC report *Closing the Gap*^{vii} which the Westminster Government had endorsed. A restructuring of forces looked likely at that time. The Committee declined to recommend preference for any of the four options put forward by the Police Authorities and Chief Constables in Wales for reasons surrounding the consultative process and differences in views on the prepared options. On the 19 June 2006 the Home Secretary announced that he would not pursue the enforced mergers of police forces due to concerns around a number of issues that rose from amalgamation.

The Maritime and Coastguard Agency

This Agency is responsible throughout the UK for implementing the Government's maritime safety policy. That includes co-ordinating search and rescue at sea through HM Coastguard, and checking that ships meet UK and international safety rules.

Overview of current policy and legislative framework

The Fire and Rescue Service was devolved under the *Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004*^{viii}. The Assembly Government's *Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales*^{ix} provides the strategic direction for the delivery of fire and rescue services at the local and all-Wales level. A progress report was published by the Assembly Government in March 2007^x. The *Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust* was set up under the *Welsh Ambulance Services National Health Service Trust (Establishment) Order 1998*^{xi}. The Police Force of England and Wales is governed by a framework of primary legislation.

'Fire and rescue services and promotion of fire safety' is field 7 and 'health and health services' is field 9 under Schedule 5 of the Government of Wales Act 2006. This means that the National Assembly for Wales can seek measure-making powers

relating to the fire and rescue and ambulance services through legislative competence orders. There is currently no field covering policing services.

On 15 June 2006, the Welsh Assembly Government Minister for Finance, Local Government and Public Services issued a Cabinet Statement entitled *Making the Connections Improvement Fund*.^{xii} This statement allocates £3 million to a number of projects including three scoping studies looking at closer working and integration between the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Trust in Wales.

Legacy issues from the committees of the Second Assembly

The Social Justice and Regeneration Committee's legacy paper^{xiii} recommended that the successor Committee(s) may like to consider the following issues in light of the possibility of a rationalisation of Welsh Police Forces in the future:

- Cost and implications of merger
- Funding arrangements
- Numbers of police and staff employed by police forces

The Health and Social Services Committee legacy paper^{xiv} recommended that successor Committee(s) should consider emergency care services and the modernisation of the Ambulance Service.

Useful Links

- Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust: <http://www.was-tr.wales.nhs.uk/>
- Healthcare Inspectorate Wales. January 2007. *Special Assurance Review of the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust*: <http://www.hiw.org.uk/Documents/477/Special%20Assurance%20Review%20Wales%20Ambulance%20Services%20NHS%20Trust%20Report%20FINAL%2Epdf>
- Home Office Police website: <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/>
- The Maritime and Coastguard Agency: http://www.mcga.gov.uk/c4mca/mcga-the_mca/mcga-mcga-aboutus.htm
- Mountain Rescue England and Wales: <http://www.mountain.rescue.org.uk/>
- Wales Air Ambulance: <http://www.walesairambulance.com/>
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution: <http://www.rnli.org.uk/>

Further information

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For further information on all other Emergency services in Wales, please contact Denise Rogers, Members' Research Service (Denise.rogers@wales.gsi.gov.uk), 029 2089 8943

ⁱ Welsh Assembly Government *Health Statistics Wales 2007: Chapter 13 – Patient Transport Services*: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health-2007/hdw200701317/?lang=en>

ⁱⁱ Wales Audit Office. 4 December 2006. *Ambulance Services in Wales*: http://www.wao.gov.uk/assets/englishdocuments/Ambulance_Inquiry.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust. January 2007. *Time to Make a Difference: Transforming Ambulance Services in Wales*: <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sites3/Documents/136/TIME%20TO%20MAKE%20A%20DIFFERENCE%20FINAL%2010%2E21%2Epdf>

^{iv} Welsh Assembly Government Press Release, *Minister launches emergency care plan consultation*, 13 July 2006. <http://www.wales.nhs.uk/newsite.cfm?contentid=4960>

^v Welsh Assembly Government. March 2007. *Fire Statistics 2005 – Statistical Bulletin 15/2007*: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/other-2007/hdw20070327/?lang=en>

^{vi} Social Justice and Regeneration Committee policy reviews on the structure of the police force in Wales can be accessed here: <http://www.wales.gov.uk/keypubassemstocjustregen/content/policy-e.htm>

^{vii} HMIC *Closing the Gap - a review of the "fitness for purpose" of the current structure of policing in England and Wales*: <http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/policing16.htm>

^{viii} *Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004*: <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2004/20040021.htm>

^{ix} Welsh Assembly Government, *Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales*: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/publications/fireandrescueframework?lang=en>

^x The Assembly Government's *Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales Report March 2007*: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/publications/fireframereport2007/?lang=en>

^{xi} Statutory Instrument 1998 No.678. *The Welsh Ambulance Services National Health Service Trust (Establishment) Order 1998*. <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1998/19980678.htm>

^{xii} Welsh Assembly Government Cabinet Statement. *Making the Connections Improvement Fund*. 15 June 2006. <http://assembly/aegis/AssemblyStaffArea/cabinet/statements/2006/15.6.06%20making%20the%20connections.doc>

^{xiii} The legacy paper of the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee can be accessed here: <http://www.wales.gov.uk/cms/2/SocialJusticeAndRegenerationCommittee/N00000000000000000000000000000006/2c5f3f182864b244dd48095511fafb79.htm>

^{xiv} The legacy paper of the Health and Social Services Committee can be accessed here: <http://www.wales.gov.uk/cms/2/HealthAndSocialServicesCommittee/37D6A89F00087B55000012140000000/90f08b54104fa9c9857e2e14265e98ec.htm>