

UNISON Cymru/Wales response to Welsh Government's consultation on reform of fire and rescue authorities in Wales

1. UNISON is the largest public sector trade union with 1.2 million members working across public services in the UK. We are a key trade union for fire and rescue staff, representing fire and rescue support staff across Wales. We welcome this opportunity to respond to Welsh Government's consultation on reform of fire and rescue authorities in Wales.
2. Support staff in the fire and rescue service play vital roles in protecting the public from harm. Behind every firefighter is a team of 'non-uniformed' support staff: mechanics and driving instructors who keep fire engines and their drivers safe; community safety and prevention officers who help to stop fires before they start; control room and admin staff and many others who make their work possible.
3. UNISON Cymru/Wales largely welcomes the reforms laid out in the consultation as it would make the fire and rescue service more democratically accountable whilst at the same time maintaining the high standards of the Fire Service.
4. However, UNISON Cymru/Wales is concerned that the public must receive an adequate and high quality service, making the best possible use of public money. Sufficient investment in fire and rescue services across Wales is essential, particularly in supporting both front-line and support staff to spend more time on prevention and community work.
5. UNISON Cymru/Wales notes the consultation's efforts to limit the disruption caused to front-line services and the mention in 1.38 that '*Changes to front-line operations, including the numbers of firefighters, appliances or fire stations, or other operational matters such as crewing, rostering or ridership arrangements, have no place in this programme of reform.*'

6. UNISON Cymru/Wales welcomes Welsh Government's acknowledgment that any overhaul of the Fire and Resecue Service must come with the least amount of disruption possible, not only to protect front-line and support staff at work, but also the public at large.
7. However, UNISON Cymru/Wales is concerned that there is no mention of fire and rescue support staff in this statement, nor anywhere else in the consultation document. We would like to see assurances from Welsh Government that the operations and staffing of support staff will also not be affected by the reform programme. In that way, our essential support staff can continue their work in protecting the public without the thought of reorganisation or job losses at the forefront of their minds.
8. UNISON does not support Police and Crime Commissioners taking over responsibility for fire and rescue services from Fire and Rescue Authorities. This bolt on approach to the role of the Police and Crime Commissioner is not well thought out and a gross interference in the role of local government.
9. Therefore, UNISON Cymru/Wales welcomes the fact that the consultation specifically states that it is not the intention of Welsh Government to hand over responsibility for fire and rescue services to PCCs.
10. UNISON Cymru/Wales concurs with the opinions of Welsh Government in the consultation document that a non-devolved elected official such as a Police and Crime Commissioner cannot have the responsibility over devolved matters such as the Fire and Rescue Service.