

Local Government and Elections (Wales) Bill – Additional evidence from fire and rescue authorities regarding section 162

South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

I would like to reiterate the points made by Cllr Jan Curtis in her email to you of 26 February 2020, with which we wholly concur. In addition, I would like to reiterate the point made to the ELG&C committee, that contrary to the assertions made, can impact directly upon frontline service delivery. This is because the Combination Order currently sets out the funding mechanisms for the FRA and enables the Authority to set a budget to enable it to discharge its functions. However, should this provision be removed, there is a significant risk that the FRA would lose control of determining its budget to meet the demands placed upon it, as it has no additional fund raising powers like local authorities (via Council Tax or charges for services, except in extremely limited circumstances). This has the serious potential to mean that the FRA would have a budget that was not sufficient to deliver the services required and as 80% of our costs are salary and the vast majority of the remainder are fixed (premise, insurance, protective kit and equipment, vehicles, fuel etc.) the only way we could deliver a balanced budget would be to reduce frontline activity to the public.

As you will appreciate from the weather conditions over the last month alone, demand can peak extremely quickly, requiring a recall to duty of staff to enable us to deliver to those most at risk . Costs can therefore escalate beyond those normally predicted extremely quickly, but the current arrangements allow for the Authority to contingency budget for these scenarios. The removal of the requirement to hold a public inquiry for some of the significant areas detailed in the Combination Order (most notably finances and budget setting) is therefore ultimately a matter that could have a very direct impact upon frontline service delivery.

I appreciate that this is a brief response given that I only became aware of this issue this morning and your deadline for response is the end of the day and my diary is already committed, but am happy to provide any further information you may require. I would therefore, respectfully request that this issue is given further consideration by the committee due to the potential serious impacts this proposed change in legislation could have upon frontline service delivery.

Regards

Sally Chapman

Dirprwy Brif Swyddog / Deputy Chief Officer