Awdurdod Tan ac Achub
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru

Mid and West Wales
Fire and Rescue Authority

Supporting information for variation of planning condition 10 to support the application for an extension to extend operating hours for a further 12-month period

Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru

Mid and West Wales
Fire and Rescue Service

Information to support the application for a 12-month extension to current weekend and evening operating hours.

The Compartment Fire Behaviour Training (CFBT) facility at the Earlswood training centre is yet to be signed off by Neath Port Talbot Local Planning due to ongoing consultation with Natural Resources Wales (NRW). As a result, the facility cannot be used to train our staff, therefore, Mid and West Wales Fire Authority have not been able to utilise the temporary agreement in place which allows the use of the facility seven days a week 09:00hrs – 22:00hrs.

The lack of utilisation has not afforded the opportunity for residents neighbouring Earlswood to provide their view of how the facility affects them when in operation during weekend days and week day evenings. It is hoped that an extension to the current agreement will provide the opportunity to garner the feedback from local residents in order to satisfy local planning conditions.

Please consider the information provided below, which aims to provide some context of Mid and West Wales Fire Authority's obligation and legal requirements to fulfil their statutory duties.

Introduction

This document will help to inform planning officers and help put some context around Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Services (MAWWFRS) roles, responsibilities, and requirements when it comes to fulfilling the training requirements for its operational workforce.

Service Response

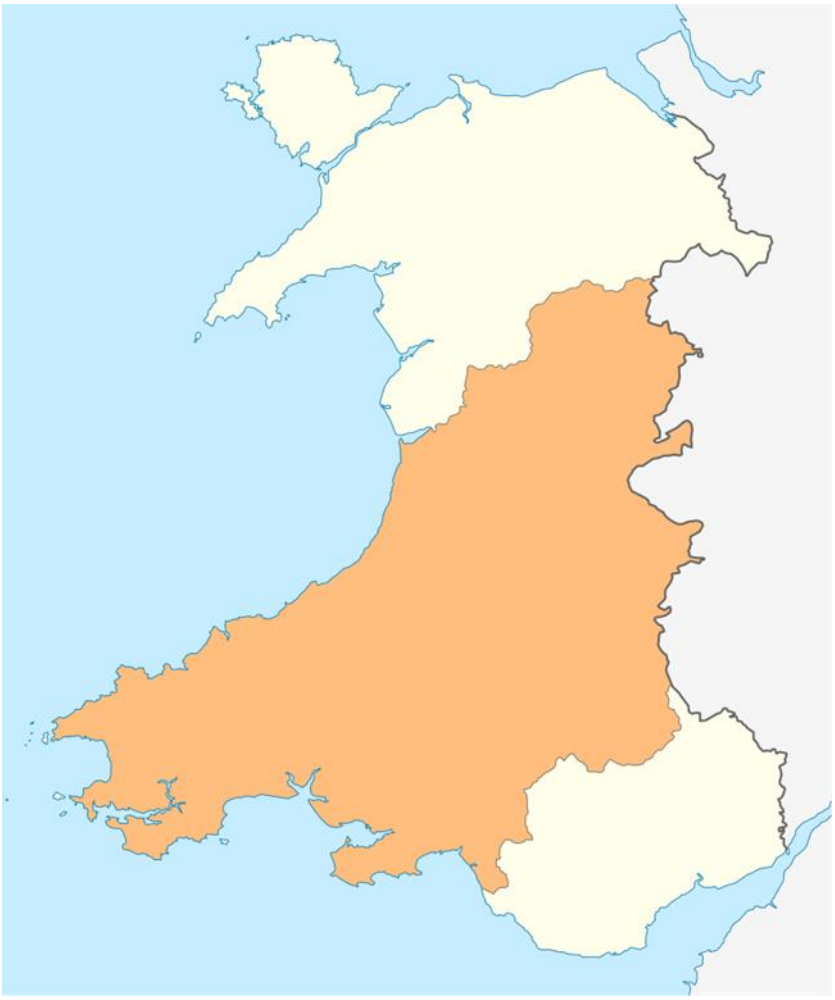
Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue serves the communities of Carmarthenshire, Ceredigion, Neath Port Talbot, Pembrokeshire, Powys and Swansea.

The service was created in 1996 by the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994 which reformed Welsh local government. It was created by a merger of the earlier Dyfed, Powys and West Glamorgan fire brigades.

Service Response provides our core protection duties for the communities we serve, comprising of Fire Control, along with our 58 Fire and Rescue Stations and their respective Command areas.

We cover some 12,000 square kilometres of Wales, with 58 Fire and Rescue Stations across the area to ensure that we can protect all our communities. These Stations are covered by a mix of crewing models based on risk and share the wide variety of skills required to deal with all the incidents we respond to.

Orange donates MAWWFRS area.



Training Delivery

The principal role of the Training Delivery department is to train and assess our operational personnel in a range of risk critical skill areas. These include Breathing Apparatus; Fire Behaviour; Road Traffic Collision; Manual Handling; Line Rescue; Emergency Response Driving; Water Rescue and Immediate Emergency Care. We also deliver initial foundation training to recruit firefighters, providing them with a range of skills which allows them to ride on our front-line appliances.

Our provision of high-quality training and regular assessment in these key areas ensures that the Service maintains a competent and highly skilled workforce, thereby providing a world class service to the communities it serves.

Compartment Fire Behaviour Training and Fire training facility

The Service has been progressing this project over the last few years. This is a substantial investment, and the first phase of this project will replace our current Fire training facility, known as the Phase 2 building.

In line with the Welsh Government and Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service environmental aspirations, this smoke capture facility will incorporate the latest technology and supply a fantastic carbonaceous practical training venue for the future. It will provide multiple scenario possibilities for Breathing Apparatus training and other training.

Phase 2 Building

The new CFBT facility

Legislation and Statutory requirements

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004
This Act is the principal legislation for the fire and rescue services of England and Wales. It describes the duties and powers of fire and rescue authorities in providing a fire and rescue service.
Sections 7, 8 and 9 describe the duties placed on fire and rescue authorities for providing an operational response. Section 11 and 12 give fire and rescue authorities the power to respond to other types of emergencies than those described in sections 7, 8 and 9.

Section 7 – firefighting

(1) A fire and rescue authority must make provision for the purpose of -

(a) extinguishing fires in its area, and

(b) protecting life and property in the event of fires in its area.

(2) In making provision under subsection (1) a fire and rescue authority must in particular -

(a) secure the provision of the personnel, services, and equipment necessary efficiently to meet all normal requirements;

(b) secure the provision of training for personnel;

(c) make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel;

(d) make arrangements for obtaining information needed for the purpose mentioned in subsection (1);

(e) make arrangements for ensuring that reasonable steps are taken to prevent or limit damage to property resulting from action taken for the purpose mentioned in subsection (1).

For MAWWFRS to meet its statutory requirements a robust and realistic training plan is required. The incidents that operational firefighters are required to attend as detailed in the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 are varied and complex, and do not discriminate as to when they occur.

Therefore, it is essential that our operational firefighters are exposed to conditions that they are likely to encounter, for instance training during hours of darkness to prepare them for what is foreseeable.

Attending fires in buildings whilst wearing Breathing Apparatus is an extremely hazardous activity, nevertheless one which MAWWFRS firefighters do on a frequent basis. Firefighter safety is of paramount importance and MAWWFRS' investment in the new CFBT facility demonstrates this.

Firefighters are often faced with challenging conditions when fighting fires in buildings, including temperatures in excess of 1000 degrees in the thermal gas layer, limited or zero visibility, obstructions from firefighting hose and contents within the building, collapsed structures, entanglement hazards to name a few, and all with the added pressure of needing to find and extinguish the fire and safely rescue any casualties.

The images below provide examples of typical hazards firefighters encounter during firefighting operations, the images were taken post fire and following the removal of fire gases and smoke at a flat fire that occurred in Sherly Towers, Hampshire on the evening of 6th April 2010.

Sadly, Firefighter (Ff) Alan Bannon and Ff James Shears lost their lives fighting this flat fire, unfortunately this is not an isolated incident. Firefighters continue to be injured and killed during their work, since the year 2000 there have been 35 Ff fatalities during training or whilst attending incidents.

Some of these include:

- Bethnal Green, London 2004 x 2 Ff deaths
- Harrow Court, Stevenage, Hertfordshire 2005 x 2 Ff deaths
- Marlie Farm, Lewes, Sussex 2006 x 2 Ff deaths

- Atherstone, Warwickshire 2007 x 4 Ff deaths
- Balmoral Bar, Edinburgh, Lothian, and Borders 2009 x 1 Ff death
- Jenners Building, Edinburgh 1023 x 1 Ff death

Fire and Rescue Service Operational Guidance for Breathing Apparatus (BA) states that all operational firefighters **must** conduct realistic Compartment Fire Behaviour training (CFBT) and be tested in conditions that they will be exposed to at operational incidents. This is in part due to decrease in serious fires occurring, thus resulting in a decrease in experiential learning. Therefore, the need for more realistic and frequent training has never been greater.

As stated previously, MAWWFRS' operational staff is made up from firefighters that work a variety of shift patterns, including firefighters working the On-Call duty system. On-Call firefighters have primary employment outside of the fire service and respond to incidents and attend training events during their spare time.

The nature of the On-Call sector means that MAWWFRS' training department are required to be flexible in its approach to how and when we deliver our core training to our On-Call staff. On-Call firefighters will have one evening a week dedicated to training, this is known as a 'Drill night.' Across the service 'Drill nights' are conducted throughout the week, different evenings in different areas.

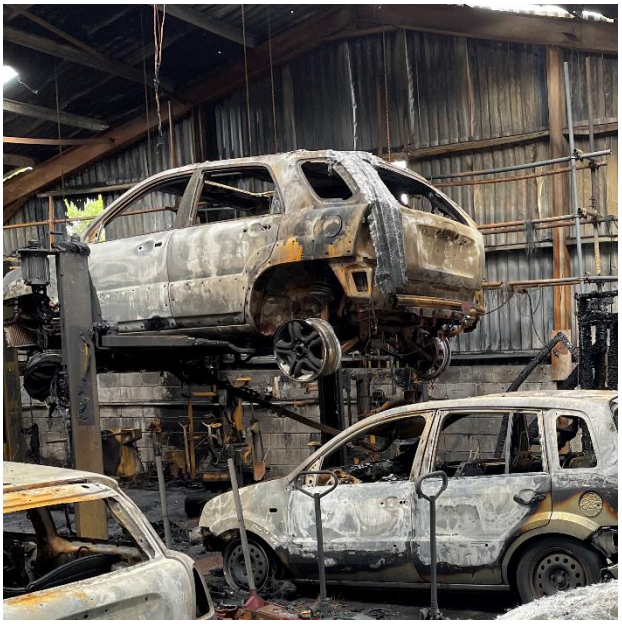
Our Wholetime staff, those who are employed as a fulltime operational firefighter either work a shift pattern, days and nights or a combination of days and on call during the nights.

This mixture of shift patterns means that we will need to facilitate training within our CFBT facility during the day and during evenings, we anticipate that we will require 2 evenings per week to enable us to facilitate the required training to the required frequency to capture all our operational staff throughout the course of the year.

The training will include fire behaviour, firefighting, search and rescue of casualties within a simulated building fire, self-rescue from entanglement, Tactical Ventilation, and Incident command, all of which will be conducted within the new CFBT facility. In addition to this we conduct Road Traffic Collision (RTC) training and core skills such as working at height, and ladder and hose drills within the confines of the training centre.

Noise mitigation will be achieved by the fact that this training will be conducted within a building, we are replacing the traditional way in which we pump water to our firefighting hose within the building (a fire appliance) with electric pumps, these will run at a less noise level.

The images below are from incidents attended by MAWWFRS firefighters and are a good example of the risk they place themselves in daily. You can clearly see entanglement hazards, machinery hazards, falls from height, and the risk of falling debris. These images reenforce the importance of firefighters being able to receive realistic training on a regular basis.



Images of current training activities

The primary duty of all fire and rescue services is to save life. In MAWWFRS this responsibility is central to how we operate such that the people we select and train, the equipment we buy and use, and the procedures we follow are focussed on that defining obligation.

Additionally, as a statutory member of Public Service Boards, Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service can identify to partners how priorities such as our primary duty has a direct impact upon the well-being of Welsh communities and how our collective activities can contribute to the well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. From an operational perspective this means;

A prosperous Wales - Our contribution towards achieving a Prosperous Wales will include providing a greater level of operational capability to keep people safer in their homes and businesses. We will also contribute to achieving a Prosperous Wales by building on operational effectiveness, the ability to train our staff regularly, in varying conditions and times of the day and night will enable us to make an effective and timely intervention to maximise the benefit for the community and reduce costs to society.

A resilient Wales – Incidents that we attend as a fire and rescue service can have a significant impact on our environment, the investment in our CFBT facility and frequent training utilising the facility will add to our ability to bring incidents of all types to a quicker conclusion, thus reducing the impact on our environment while continuing to maintain a high standard of Service Delivery.

A healthier Wales - As well as the obvious risks of fire and smoke on health through burns and smoke inhalation, our continued work with health agencies has identified that there are real risks to health from being exposed to the by-products of fire. Smoke and flames are visible but other by-products of burning are often not as apparent and can have serious and long-term risks to public health, particularly to those who are young, old or have existing health conditions. By increasing our effectiveness through continued training and thus the ability to resolve incidents through effective firefighting, we can reduce the harm on public health.

Cohesive Communities – regular realistic training and testing of our staff will assist decision making at operational incidents and will help us achieve our contribution towards a Wales of Cohesive Communities.

A more equal Wales – Communities can be blighted by the aftermath of fires and the visible after-effect of a fire has a negative effect on that community. The damage can often deter potential investors as well as impacting on well-being.

Vibrant Culture and Language - Our contribution to a Wales of Vibrant Culture and thriving Welsh Language is to continue to encourage and promote the use of the Welsh Language within our service area. Where possible, we will promote access to our services through the utilisation of the Welsh language, to ensure that our stakeholders are able to communicate with us in their preferred language. We will also continue to encourage our staff to speak their preferred language in the workplace and provide opportunities to staff who wish to learn Welsh.

A Globally Responsible Wales – Enabling our firefighters to bring Incidents to a swifter conclusion will influence the achievement of a Globally Responsible Wales. This will also be achieved via our partnership working with other agencies when jointly training and resolving Incidents of all types.

To conclude, we hope that this document has helped to emphasise the importance of training for operational firefighters, it is fundamental in everything we do, and continuous training helps to keep our firefighters as safe as we can during the challenges of the activities the perform when keeping our communities safe.

If I can provide any further assistance, please contact me via email: s.bate@mawwfire.gov.uk

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