

## Ensuring fire and rescue resilience across Wales

### Business needs

In recent years the three Welsh Fire and Rescue Services have been increasingly aware of the evolving operational demands facing their service. Prolonged periods of bad weather, influenza pandemics and even the possibility of terrorist attacks were new threats that needed to be seriously considered and the appropriate information, infrastructure and operational practices developed and implemented to manage such scenarios.

Based on these observations and conclusions, a set of strategic goals were defined that supported an intention to increase resilience, capacity and collaborative-working in the Welsh Fire and Rescue Service.

With all three FRSs in Wales already running the Capita **VisionFX** Command and Control solution, Capita were well placed to provide further functionality to meet their enhanced resilience goals.

The project commissioned by the three FRSs themselves but entirely funded by The Welsh Assembly Government at the start of 2009.



### Resilience objectives

- Provide capability to receive calls and mobilise on behalf of another Welsh FRS
- Extend the resource mobilisation and communications infrastructure
- Handle overflowing calls from one FRS to the others during spate conditions
- Improve Mutual Assistance processes by which one FRS requests the assistance of resources belonging to the others
- Improve awareness and utilisation of retained personnel
- Enhance the capability to co-ordinate FRS activities from Emergency Co-ordination Centre for Wales during a major emergency operation



### Project delivery

The project was divided into development streams which could proceed largely independently.

- Resilient Architecture – providing an additional Capita **Vision** server and four workstations for each FRS, physically located at the Buddy site, and connecting the Control Rooms together over the PSBA network.
- Shared Gazetteer - an “All Wales” premise level Gazetteer. This allows any control room operator in any of the three FRSs to search for and use, in their own local system, a geo-coded address anywhere in the country.
- InterCAD Interface – linking the Control Rooms together so that incidents may be passed between them, and resources tracked when providing assistance to a neighbour.
- RAPPEL – tracking the availability of individual retained fire-fighters, in order to determine the availability of the appliances they crew.
- Emergency Co-ordination Centre for Wales ECC (W) – supplying a Capita **Vision** Command Client for each FRS to allow staff located at ECC (W) to monitor FRS activities during a major event.



## Introducing the system

Traditionally, new Command and Control systems are introduced into operation during a "Go Live" event with Capita present to monitor that the cutover proceeds smoothly. However, as much of the functionality presented through this project could not be guaranteed to be used in the period immediately following Go Live, an additional step was agreed. Two exercises were organised by the Fire and Rescue Services to simulate the types of exceptional events that the solution is designed to address. The technical aspects of the system had been through Site Acceptance Tests previously, so that the exercises could concentrate on working practices and staff readiness.

The first exercise concentrated on a spate conditions scenario, with 60 calls being made to the primary Control Room and 20 calls to its Buddy within the same half hour period. In the second exercise, one of the Control Rooms was closed down with its operational workload being picked up by its Buddy, initially using the Buddy Control's staff, who then handed over to staff who had travelled to the Buddy site from the "evacuated" Control Room.

## Buddy concept

One of the key concepts introduced by the solution provided was that of the Buddy site. For each Fire and Rescue Service, one of the others is nominated as its Buddy, acting as the primary partner when support is needed. Mid and West Wales acts as South Wales's Buddy, North Wales as the Buddy for Mid and West Wales, and South Wales for North Wales. Commenting on this arrangement Nigel Williams Head of ICT for the Mid and West Wales Service and overall Project Manager explained, "The Buddy site concept was a pragmatic solution to addressing the requirements for improved resilience without disruption to the existing control room structures. In essence our objective was to make better use of the prevailing control room resources by linking the facilities together and through the innovative deployment of some already proven technologies." The Buddy solution that is based around the VISION system also allows each fire service to maintain ownership of its individual command and control system and has resulted in minimal system management or control room procedural change.

