



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

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About the Auditor General for Wales

The Auditor General is independent of government, and is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. The Auditor General undertakes his work using staff and other resources provided by the Wales Audit Office, which is a statutory board established for that purpose and to monitor and advise the Auditor General. The Wales Audit Office is held to account by the National Assembly.

Together with appointed auditors, the Auditor General audits local government bodies in Wales, including unitary authorities, police, probation, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and community councils. He also conducts local government value for money studies and assesses compliance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

Beyond local government, the Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Assembly Commission and National Health Service bodies in Wales.

The Auditor General and staff of the Wales Audit Office aim to provide public-focused and proportionate reporting on the stewardship of public resources and in the process provide insight and promote improvement.

This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Lisa Williams and Ron Price under the direction of Jane Holownia.

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Summary report

- 1 Each year, the Auditor General must report on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement in delivering their services. This report draws on the work undertaken on the Auditor General's behalf by staff of the Wales Audit Office, as well as the work of relevant Welsh inspectorates. The report covers the Authority's delivery and evaluation of services in relation to 2012-13, its planning of improvement for 2013-14 and 2014-15 and, taking these into account, records the Auditor General's conclusion on whether the Authority will make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15.
- 2 We found that, in 2012-13, the Authority delivered improvements in its core functions. We have come to this conclusion because the Authority:
 - has worked hard to reduce the number of fires it attends in dwellings by undertaking an extensive range of preventative activities;
 - engages well with partners to encourage safer non domestic premises and is seeking ways to improve the management information it uses to support this work;
 - has a well managed programme of activities in place to reduce the number of deliberate fires;
 - works actively with partners to encourage road safety; and
 - maintained an effective and resilient service during periods of industrial action.
- 3 We also found that the Authority has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 although there is potential to strengthen its arrangements further. We came to this conclusion because:
 - the Authority published its Performance Assessment for 2012-13 (the Assessment) within statutory deadlines, clearly evaluated success in achieving its improvement objectives and included all required national strategic and core performance indicators;
 - the Assessment outlines its approach to collaboration;
 - the Authority made citizens and partners aware of the Assessment's existence;
 - the Authority implemented most of our previous proposals for improvement; and
 - the Assessment could further improve by including actual data described in the 'how success is measured' section, and by using more comparative data.
- 4 Finally, we found that the Authority has discharged its planning duties under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. Business planning arrangements continue to improve but strong leadership will be needed to implement the changes necessary to address the financial challenges ahead. We came to this conclusion because:
 - the Authority developed more effective arrangements for improvement planning during 2013-14;

- financial challenges continue to be managed effectively although the scale of change required will continue to demand strong leadership and direction;
- initiatives to promote and support the use of the Welsh Language continue;
- adequate arrangements are in place to meet Public Interest Disclosure legislation;
- work is continuing with other Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities to develop consistent Human Resource baseline information; and
- strong leadership at Authority Member and Senior Officer level is required to successfully implement planned changes to the service.

5 Taking the above into account, the Auditor General considers that the Authority is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2014-15 if it is able to address the challenges in implementing planned changes.

Proposals for improvement

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| P1 | Strengthen the Performance Assessment by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • including actual data in the 'how success is measured' section; • explain why specific measures are used to evaluate progress to aid the readers understanding; and • use more comparative data in the Performance assessment to show comparative performance in key areas against other Welsh Improvement Authorities. |
| P2 | Address data inaccuracies in the Community Fire Risk Management Information System (CFRMIS) through collaboration with the system supplier. |
| P3 | Ensure that the new Performance Reporting system is less reliant on subjective input about progress on improvement objectives from individual managers and ensure that a mechanism to report overall progress for all improvement objectives is in place. |
| P4 | Members and officers should together explore the reasons for the lack of confidence in decision making evidenced by the volume of issues raised, and look for ways to improve joint communications particularly when needing to communicate the rationale for difficult decisions. |

- P5 Determine how change management and governance arrangements can be enhanced to provide support to senior officers implementing new ways of working and to show collective ownership of decision-making. This could include:
- improving the quality of minute taking at meetings;
 - maintaining an effective media and communications strategy at all levels to provide effective reassurance to the public that agreed change is necessary and to adequately inform the public of the risk profile that the change will produce;
 - reviewing how relations with its external stakeholders can be developed, so that whilst decisions may be challenged, this can be done in an environment where a common set of values has been agreed;
 - reviewing whether current delegated decision making arrangements are appropriate (both now and in light of any future changes as a result of the Williams Review); and
 - considering external mediation or facilitation and advice where necessary.

Detailed report

Introduction

- 6 Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure), the Auditor General must report each year on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement in delivering their services. [Appendix 1](#) provides more information about the Auditor General's powers and duties under the Measure. This work has been undertaken by staff of the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General with help from the Welsh Language Commissioner. We have brought together a picture of what each Council or Authority in Wales is trying to achieve, how it is going about it, and the progress the Authority has made since the Auditor General published his last annual improvement report. The report also draws on the Authority's own self-assessment. Finally, taking all this into account, the report records the Auditor General's conclusion on whether the Authority is likely to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement for 2014-15.
- 7 We do not undertake a comprehensive annual review of all of the Authority's arrangements or services. The conclusions in this report are based on our cumulative and shared knowledge and the findings of prioritised work undertaken this year.
- 8 Given the wide range of services provided and the challenges facing the Authority, it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:
- make proposals for improvement – if proposals are made to the Authority, we would expect them to do something about them and we will follow up what happens;
 - make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made the Authority must prepare a response to that recommendation within 30 working days;
 - conduct a special inspection and publish a report and make recommendations; and
 - recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way.
- 9 We want to find out if this report gives you the information you need and whether it is easy to understand. You can let us know your views by e-mailing us at info@wao.gov.uk or writing to us at 24, Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9LJ.

The Authority is delivering improvements in its core functions

- 10 In July 2013 the Welsh Government published a report¹ about the progress the three Welsh fire and rescue authorities have made against the National Framework² during the period April 2011 to March 2013. The report takes a strategic overview and focuses on those priority areas highlighted in the previous and extant Framework made by the FRAs over the last two years, particularly for:
- Collaboration – how the FRAs engage with other public bodies, the third sector, the Welsh Government and the public and communities which the FRAs serve;
 - Planning and Performance – improving the quality and availability of the FRAs’ services and the need to deliver improved services and better outcomes for the people of Wales, with less resources;
 - Service Delivery – core duties of the FRAs to mitigate the effect of identified risks, ensuring a professional and effective response to a range of incidents;
 - Resilience – how the FRAs work to respond to major threats; and
 - Resources – how the FRAs focus on priorities for leadership and workforce planning, development and training to ensure that the FRAs provide the best possible service to citizens, while protecting their own staff.
- 11 The purpose of the National Framework is to provide direction for Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities in the discharging of their statutory duties and their role in the context of the wider public sector. There are a number of key roles and duties which form the core of both Frameworks:
- the need to provide a resilient service;
 - the need to work collaboratively to achieve common goals; and
 - the need for innovation and new ways of working to make the most of the talents, expertise and resources that exist in Wales.
- 12 There are two key themes running throughout the “2012 onwards” Framework for FRAs to focus on:
- measuring outcomes for citizens and how collaboration supports this agenda; and
 - managing with less, whilst maintaining appropriate services to citizens, in the current economic climate.
- 13 In light of the report, and to avoid duplication of effort, we have not undertaken further evaluation of the fire and rescue authorities progress against the national framework ourselves. However, in the following paragraphs we provide a summary of the Authority’s performance in four specific areas (dwelling fires, non-domestic premises fires, deliberate fire setting, road traffic accidents) in order to form a view on the

¹ *Fire and Rescue National Framework Report 2011-2013*

² (The “*Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales*” published in 2008 and the extant “*Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012 onwards*” which set out the Welsh Government’s vision and priorities for Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs)).

Authority's improvement in its core functions. We have highlighted some examples of the activities undertaken by the Authorities in keeping with the main themes of the Framework as outlined in paragraphs 12 and 13.

The Authority has worked hard to reduce the number of fires it attends in dwellings by undertaking an extensive range of preventative activities

- 14 The Authority has, with the other Welsh fire and rescue authorities developed the Dwelling Fire Response Charter which outlines the level of prevention, protection and response that communities can expect on dwelling fire risk in order to reduce the instances of death, injury and accidental fires in domestic dwellings.
- 15 The Authority undertakes extensive preventative activities to reduce the number of dwelling fires it attends. Many staff, based in both operational stations and central teams, contribute to a range of different activities aimed at raising awareness and warning of the dangers that may lead to a dwelling fire.
- 16 Home fire safety checks (HFSCs) are an important part of this work as is the school education programme, many of which are undertaken in conjunction with external partners. The Authority aims to make the HFSCs undertaken as targeted as possible to those most at risk from fire in the home. In order to do this it liaises with a number

of partner agencies who have access to a data that the Authority can use as a means of determining risks. Home Fire Safety Checks provide households with a range of information and advice on how to reduce the risk of fires in the home and what to do if one occurs.

- 17 The total number of fires attended across Wales has reduced considerably over the last decade, from 26,327 in 2004-05 to 11,437 in 2012-13, a reduction of 57 per cent. In Mid and West Wales the total number of fires attended has reduced from 7,166 in 2004-05 to 3,245 in 2012-13, a reduction of 55 per cent over the same period.
- 18 The total number of dwelling fires attended decreased by eight per cent during 2012 13 compared with the previous year (from 610 attendances in 2011-12 to 563 in 2012 13). In addition:
- dwelling fires started accidentally decreased by five per cent during 2012 13 compared with the previous year (from 555 in 2011-12 to 525 in 2012-13), which is better than the four per cent decrease across Wales for the same period; and
 - the number of dwelling fires started deliberately decreased by 31 per cent (from 55 on 2011-12 to 38 in 2012-13), which is significantly better than the 20 per cent decrease across Wales for the same period.

- 19 The total number of fires in homes in which a home fire safety risk assessment and/or associated risk reduction activity has taken place within two years before the fire increased from 49 in 2011-12 to 81 in 2012-13, an increase of 65 per cent, compared with a five per cent increase across Wales.
- 20 One person died in a dwelling fire during 2012-13 (three people died in dwelling fires during 2011-12). The number of injuries sustained in dwelling fires decreased by 18 per cent during 2012-13 (from 55 in 2011-12 to 45 in 2012-13) compared with a one per cent decrease across Wales for the same period.
- 21 There is some evidence to suggest that free smoke alarms provided as part of the Authority's HFSCs work are reaching those at risk, in particular, of those fires attended:
- fewer had no smoke alarm fitted (from 39 per cent in 2011-12 to 33 per cent in 2012-13), although this proportion is still higher than the Welsh average of 30 per cent for 2012-13;
 - there was an increase in the activation of fire detection equipment (from 48 per cent in 2011-12 to 50 per cent in 2012-13) although this proportion is lower than the Welsh average of 51 per cent for the same period; and
 - more dwellings had fire detection equipment fitted which did not activate (from 12 per cent in 2011-12 to 15 per cent in 2012-13) which is lower than the Welsh average of 19 per cent for the same period.

The Authority engages well with partners to encourage safer non domestic premises and is seeking ways to improve the management information it uses to support this work

- 22 The Authority undertakes business fire safety activities each year through a programme of risk based audits of business premises. The Authority also uses knowledge of incidents to target additional work to minimise fire risk in non-domestic premises. The Authority has worked positively with the business community in undertaking business fire safety audits and raising awareness of fire safety issues.
- 23 It is positive that the number of fires in non-domestic premises across Wales has fallen by 51 per cent in the period from 2004-05 to 2012-13. Within Mid and West Wales it has fallen by 56 per cent over the same period.
- 24 The Authority recognises that the database which holds information in respect of the location and type of non domestic buildings CFRMIS (Community Fire Risk Management Information System) is not accurate due to data matching issues from the information sources which populate the CFRMIS database. Whilst the supplier has caused some of these issues, and efforts to resolve the issues continue, it undermines the ability of the Authority to accurately report and measure risk across non-domestic premises.
- 25 The number of non-domestic premises fires attended decreased by 22 per cent during 2012-13 compared with the previous year (from 282 attendances in 2011-12 to 220

- in 2012-13) which is better than the Welsh average decrease of 16 per cent for the same period.
- 26 There were no deaths in non-domestic premises fires during 2012-13 (same as in 2011-12) in line with the position across Wales. The number of injuries sustained in such fires decreased from 11 in 2011-12 to six in 2012-13, which is a 45 per cent decrease, compared with a 33 per cent decrease across Wales for the same period. However, these numbers are small and each incident can have a significant impact on the year on year comparison.
- 27 Reducing the number of false alarm calls (caused by automatic fire detection and alarm systems in non-domestic premises) received and attended (including malicious) so that fire and rescue services across Wales spend less time, fuel and resources at unnecessary events is a key strand of work with managers of non domestic premises. This includes working with hospitals and universities as well as owners of small and large business premises.
- 28 The total number of malicious false alarm calls received has fallen by 48 per cent over the last few years across Wales (from 5,210 in 2004-05 to 2,706 in 2012-13). Within Mid and West Wales the total number of malicious false alarm calls received in the same period reduced by 60 per cent (from 1,197 in 2004-05 to 484 in 2012-13).
- 29 Within Mid and West Wales the total number of malicious false alarm calls received reduced by 12 per cent (from 551 in 2011-12 to 484 in 2012-13) which is broadly in line with the 11 per cent decrease across Wales
- in the same period (from 3,024 in 2011-12 to 2,706 in 2012-13).
- 30 Since 2004-05 the number of malicious false alarm calls attended within Wales reduced by 60 per cent from 1775 in 2004-05 to 702 in 2012-13. Within Mid and West Wales the number of malicious false alarms attended reduced by 68 per cent from 561 in 2004-05 to 180 in 2012-13. The total number of malicious false alarm calls attended remained the same for both 2011-12 and 2012-13 (at 180). This compares with a 13 per cent decrease across Wales in the same period (from 807 in 2011-12 to 702 in 2012-13).
- 31 Across Wales the total number of false alarms attended (caused by automatic fire detection and alarm systems in non-domestic premises) has fallen by 25 per cent over the last few years (from 9,217 in 2004-05 to 6,953 in 2012-13). Within Mid and West Wales the number attended decreased by 14 per cent (from 1,950 in 2004-05 to 1,683 in 2012-13) over the same period.
- 32 Within Mid and West Wales the total number of false alarms attended (caused by automatic fire detection and alarm systems in non-domestic premises) increased by two per cent (from 1,653 in 2011-12 to 1,683 in 2012-13), compared with a one per cent decrease across Wales for the same period.
- 33 The National Issues Committee (NIC) is currently reviewing call challenge and response arrangements in respect of automated false alarms in non-domestic premises in order to develop an all Wales approach.

The Authority has a well managed programme of activities in place to reduce the number of deliberate fires

- 34 The Authority has pursued a prevention agenda and worked well with external partners in reducing fire risk across the area. The work of the Arson Reduction Team in collaboration with the Police in targeting, for instance, grassland fires is a contributory element in this prevention work. The Authority also acknowledge that seasonal factors, weather and cultural issues can affect deliberate fire setting.
- 35 Across Wales the total number of deliberate fires attended over the last few years has fallen by 68 per cent over the last few years (from 19,709 in 2004-05 to 6,399 in 2012-13). Within Mid and West Wales the number attended also decreased by 68 per cent (from 4,712 in 2004-05 to 1,494 in 2012-13) over the same period.
- 36 The number of deliberate fires attended decreased by 38 per cent during 2012-13 compared with the previous year (from 2,426 attendances in 2011-12 to 1,494 attendances in 2012-13) which is lower than the Welsh average decrease of 40 per cent for the same period.
- 37 Forty six per cent of all fires attended within Mid and West Wales during 2012-13 were started deliberately. This is lower than 2011-12 (54 per cent) and is lower than the Welsh average of 56 per cent for the same period.

- 38 The number of injuries sustained in deliberate fires decreased from seven in 2011-12 to four in 2012-13, a reduction of 87 per cent, compared with the Welsh average decrease of 77 per cent for the same period. However, these numbers are small and each incident can have a significant impact on the year on year comparison.
- 39 There were no deaths in deliberate fires during 2012-13 (a figure of one death in a deliberate fire was recorded during 2011-12).

The Authority works actively with partners to encourage road safety

- 40 Road safety is not a statutory duty for the Authority but it works in collaboration with the Police and others to improve safety on the roads through the Road Safety Wales Group. In order to promote road safety the Authority, together with other road safety partners, undertook many initiatives designed to decrease the number of road accidents including:
- maintaining its partner role with the Road Safety Wales Group;
 - the Pass Plus Cymru driving scheme which is aimed at young drivers aged 18 to 25;
 - the Motor Education Scheme is a partnership initiative involving Police and Local Authorities; and
 - impact roadshow displays and participating in multi-agency road safety days.

41 Road Safety figures show general improvement across Wales during 2012-13, with significant reductions in fatal and serious accident figures, and fewer deaths and injuries than the previous year. The Authority has seen an improvement this year; the number of fatal and serious accidents, casualties, fatalities and young drivers involved in accidents decreased but the total number of road traffic collisions attended and the number of motorcyclist casualties increased:

- The number of road traffic collisions attended has increased by nine per cent during 2012 from 1,007 in 2011-12 to 1,110 in 2012-13; this is higher than the three per cent reduction across Wales in the same period.
- Fatal and serious accidents have reduced in Mid and West Wales by 13 per cent, from 413 accidents in 2011 to 358 accidents in 2012; this is lower than the 16 per cent reduction across Wales in the same period.
- The number of people who died in road traffic collisions remained the same with 38 deaths in 2011 and 2012; there was a 23 per cent reduction in the number of deaths across Wales over the same period.
- The number of casualties decreased by seven per cent between 2011 when there were 3,345 casualties and 2012 when there were 3,107, which is less than the nine per cent reduction seen across Wales.

- Fewer drivers aged 25 and under were involved in road traffic accidents. The number involved has fallen from 987 in 2011 to 904 in 2012, a reduction of eight per cent. This is lower than the 11 per cent reduction across Wales for the same period.
- There were five per cent more motorcyclist casualties in 2012 than 2011 (261 compared with 249 in 2011) which is a greater increase than the two per cent increase across Wales for the same period.

The Authority maintained an effective and resilient service during periods of industrial action

42 Since mid 2013 the Authority has faced challenges in a national dispute primarily relating to the Government's proposed changes to Pension arrangements for fire fighters. This has required the Authority to put in place arrangements to maintain its services during these periods of industrial action which has placed an additional burden on the Authority, both financially and operationally. The Authority managed this challenge effectively during 2013 whilst also supporting other Welsh fire and rescue authorities without any substantive loss of service. The ongoing dispute remains a challenge for the Authority during 2014 and it is uncertain what impact this will have on the Authority moving forward.

The Authority has discharged its improvement reporting duties although there is potential to strengthen its arrangements further

The Authority published its Performance Assessment for 2012-13 within statutory deadlines, clearly evaluated success in achieving its improvement objectives and included all required national strategic and core performance indicators

- 43 The Authority approved and published its Performance Assessment 2012-13 before the statutory deadline of 31 October 2013. Within the Assessment the Authority evaluated its success in achieving its improvement objectives and expressed its view clearly.
- 44 The Assessment includes details of performance as measured by the national strategic and core performance indicators. Our review of data quality during 2013 found that national strategic and core indicator information was accurate and supported by appropriate mechanisms to evaluate, monitor and review data.
- 45 In its Performance Indicator Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities the Welsh Government also suggests that the following (mainly local) measures should be included:
- performance in maintaining operational competence (although skills gap data is included);
 - performance against the Welsh Fire and Rescue Equality and Diversity Strategy;
 - performance against the Authority's Welsh Language Scheme; and

- information in respect of sustainability (where there is a specific improvement objective for this).

- 46 The Authority has included most of the information in these areas in its Performance Assessment for 2012-13. However, whilst there is reference to the Welsh Fire and Rescue Equality and Diversity Scheme and a link to the Strategic Equality Plan 2012-13 and statistics regarding the diversity of the workforce, the amount of performance information in this area is limited.

The Assessment outlines its approach to collaboration

- 47 The Authority has set out in its Assessment how it has developed collaboration with other emergency services and agencies including specialists from Local Health Boards. It collaborated with Hywel Dda Health Board on a Mental Health project providing training to Mental Health practitioners on delivering home fire safety and fire safety awareness to student nurses. Fire Service personnel were provided with mental health training in order to better engage with vulnerable individuals.
- 48 Collaborative working with the Police has led to the Arson Reduction Team providing training to 77 Police Community Support Officers. The Arson Reduction Team also works with Natural Resource Wales where hazardous site clearance is an issue, and on land management in relation to grassland fires.

49 The Authority has been effective in increasing the number of HFSCs carried out by partners. The Voluntary sector partnership has seen an increase of 51 per cent in the number of HFSCs undertaken by partners such as Groundwork and Care and Repair.

The Authority made citizens and partners aware of the Assessment's existence

50 The Authority has made its citizens aware of the existence of the Assessment. It is easily accessible, in English and Welsh, on the Authority's website with hard copies, and other formats, available on request. The Assessment makes it clear how people can propose new priorities for improvement and engage with the Authority on improvement planning.

The Authority implemented most of our previous proposals for improvement

51 In the Auditor General's last *Annual Improvement Report* in May 2013, we concluded that evaluation and reporting was better than previous years, but there was scope to strengthen public reporting and make it more accessible, in line with Welsh Government guidance. We noted the Authority's *Performance Assessment Report* for 2011-12 did not fully reflect Welsh Government guidance but would do so if the Authority:

- drew out the areas of improvement more clearly;

- included a clear statement of how well it thinks it has achieved of its area of improvement;
- include a rationale to explain why specific measures used are appropriate to evaluate progress; and
- used clearer explanations that enable readers to see and understand the impact of improvements and changes during the year.

52 We also noted that the Authority took steps to publicise the availability of its assessment but relied heavily on the electronic format and consequently wider access to the data may be an issue for some. The Authority also used a narrow range of relevant information to arrive at its conclusion and was working to improve its ability to show the impact of its activity.

53 The Authority has responded positively to our previous proposals for improvement and suggestions to make the document more 'user friendly'. The Authority did this by:

- making a summary of performance widely available;
- drawing out the areas of improvement in 2012-13 within the five thematic areas of the Authority's Strategic Improvement Plan (managing risk, managing people, working together, managing resources and managing performance);
- including a clear statement of how well the Authority thinks it has achieved in each of its thematic areas for improvement; and

- using less ‘technical’ language and providing clearer explanations that enable readers to see and understand the impact of improvements and changes made during the year.

The Assessment could further improve by including actual data described in the ‘how success is measured’ section, and by using more comparative data

54 The Authority could further improve its future assessments by:

- Including actual data described in the ‘how success has been measured’ section. Although listed the actual data is not provided. Doing so, together with a rationale to explain why specific measures are used to evaluate progress would aid the readers understanding.
- By using more comparative data. Although the Assessment contains comparison data against the Welsh National Strategic and Core indicators, and targets for 2013-14 there is limited use of comparative data showing performance against other Welsh Improvement Authorities.

55 The Authority is currently consulting with the other Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales through the NIC on how more comparative data can be used.

The Authority has discharged its planning duties and business planning arrangements continue to improve but strong leadership will be needed to implement the changes necessary to address the financial challenges ahead

The Authority developed more effective arrangements for improvement planning during 2013-14

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| 56 | The Authority has developed more effective arrangements to support improvement planning during 2013-14. Arrangements are in place to determine improvement objectives in a collaborative way. The Authority has a member working group and has given staff opportunities to feed their views in on improvement planning. Staff were aware of the improvement objectives for 2013-14 and 2014-15. | 59 | management system (as a replacement for the Ffynnon system) and use of the new intranet site. |
| 57 | The Authority has set out explanations of why its three improvement objectives were chosen for 2014-15. The three improvement objectives are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • staff, communities and stakeholders feel better informed and aware of what Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority do and how well they do it; • continue making communities safer through minimising risks and maintaining standards of service delivery within a reduced budget; and • understand how actions deliver better outcomes for communities to inform future planning and improve the services the Authority delivers. | 60 | The Authority has provided details of the improvement objectives to stakeholders and the public. The Authority e-mailed its Performance Assessment to partners and stakeholders. |
| 58 | The Authority has stated its intended outcome and broadly describes 'how it will measure and report achievements' for all three improvement objectives. It is continuing to draw together the detailed information it needs to support these measures through the new performance | 61 | We found an increased focus on equality whilst selecting the Improvement Objectives for 2014-15. The new performance management system builds in checks and prompts in respect of Equality Impact Assessments and more adequately reflects the needs of those people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010. |
| | | 62 | The Authority has recognised the importance of consultation and engagement with the communities that it serves and that it can improve how it does this. It has made this an improvement objective for 2014-15 and now needs to develop clear performance measures to assess progress on engagement and consultation. |
| | | 62 | Current performance reporting to members is very detailed and focuses on actions with departments and commands. This allows managers to subjectively assess progress against objectives, which may lead to inconsistencies in the use of the RAG status that underpins the reporting. These updates on actions are not 'pulled together' to form an overall view of progress against improvement objectives and this makes it difficult for the Authority to assess overall progress. More robust and defined arrangements are necessary to bring about more consistent and accurate performance reporting. |

63 We found there are some challenges regarding the adequacy of systems which the Authority uses to support its planning and producing Welsh Government returns in two specific areas:

- **Business fire safety data** – the database which holds information in respect of the location and type of non domestic buildings CFRMIS is not accurate due to data matching issues from the information sources which populate the CFRMIS database. Whilst the supplier has caused some of these issues, and efforts to resolve the issues continue it undermines the ability of the Authority to accurately report and measure risk across non-domestic premises.
- **The asset register** – the asset register is maintained by the Finance department on a spreadsheet which is manually updated each year. The Authority is determining how the information should be collected and maintained in the future collaboratively with other Welsh fire and rescue authorities.

Financial challenges continue to be managed effectively although the scale of change required will continue to demand strong leadership and direction

64 On 25 September 2013, the auditor appointed by the Auditor General issued an unqualified audit opinion on the Authority's accounting statements. A copy of the Appointed Auditor's Annual Audit Letter to the Authority, which summarises the key messages arising from the audit, is attached at [Appendix 3](#). The review of matters brought to my attention by local government electors (referred to in this letter) has now been concluded and the audit for 2012-13 will be closed shortly.

65 On 20 October 2010 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the 2010 spending review to Parliament. This review formed a central part of the coalition government's response to reducing the national deficit, with the intention to bring public finances into balance. These savings represent the largest reduction in public spending since the 1920s and come at a time when demographic changes and recession-based economic pressures are increasing demand for some services. To effectively plan their finances authorities need to analyse details of financial trends, appropriate benchmarking information, possible scenarios and their likely impact over the short, medium and long term. The current financial climate and the recent tough settlement for local government mean that good financial planning is critical to sustaining financial resilience.

66 We are currently examining authorities' financial health, their approach to budgeting and delivering on required savings, to provide assurance that authorities are financially resilient. This work will consider whether authorities have robust approaches in place to manage the budget reductions that they are facing to secure a stable financial position that enable them to continue to operate for the foreseeable future. The focus of the work is on the 2014-15 financial planning period and the delivery of 2013-14 budgets. This review will be completed early in 2014-15 and we will publish the findings in our next cycle of improvement assessment work.

67 The Authority has approved a net budget of £43,522,194 for 2014/15 which represents a 0.81 per cent reduction from the previous year. The approved budget will be part funded by a contribution of £605,000 from reserves enabling a contribution of £42,917,194 from the Constituent Authorities, which is a 1.56 per cent reduction on the previous year. It has also approved a Capital Programme and a vehicle replacement programme for the period 2014 to 2017.

68 Whilst the Authority does not yet have indicative funding figures for 2016-17, the pressures on its finances for the next two years are considerable and challenging. The Authority has seen an on-going reducing trend in the number of fires, injuries and deaths year on year. Significant changes to the way in which services are provided, for example, through Rural Response Pumps, the Small Fires Unit in Swansea and crewing changes at Llanelli, has released resources

to support community safety activities and to maintain a resilient operational response.

69 Utilising reserves represents a way of minimising the effects of the financial pressures, but given general inflationary pressures, a one per cent pay award needing to be implemented in each of the next three years and increases in pension contributions, then clearly there is a limit to how reserves can be utilised. The need to balance budgets in 2015-16 and 2016-17 will require the Authority to make difficult decisions as the current service provision appears unworkable within the predicted financial constraints.

Initiatives to promote and support the use of the Welsh Language continue

70 The Service has invested time and resource to ensure compliance with the Welsh Language Scheme, and has striven to carry out its duties through positive encouragement and by adopting an inclusive method of implementing the Scheme. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer and the Chair of the Fire Authority have responsibility for the Welsh language in their portfolio which ensures that the Welsh language is considered at the highest levels. The Service has commenced the work of objectively assessing the Welsh language requirements of all posts in order to identify any gaps in the service. The Service should complete this as soon as possible in order to get to grips with any shortcomings. There has been a substantial improvement in the organisation's ability to correspond with the public in accordance with the Language Scheme.

Adequate arrangements are in place to meet Public Interest Disclosure legislation

- 71 The Authority has put in place adequate arrangements to meet the requirements of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, and the changes made to Whistle Blowing law by the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Act 2013.
- 72 It has received external advice and support in developing a new policy for Public Interest Disclosure (Whistle Blowing) and has consulted on this new policy. The policy was agreed on 9 December 2013. The Authority should now make sure that staff are aware of the new policy and how it affects them.

Work is continuing with other Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities to develop consistent Human Resource baseline information

- 73 We set out in our Annual Regulatory Plan that we would undertake a thematic review of arrangements covering Human Resources at Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority as well as the other Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities. This work is still ongoing.
- 74 During 2013 arrangements have been agreed between the Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities to develop common baseline information about Human Resources activities and resources, to enable meaningful comparison to take place. We support this ambition and encourage further analysis to identify trends and outliers. We will work with the Authorities in developing and using this information during 2014.

Strong leadership at Authority Member and Senior Officer level is required to successfully implement planned changes to the service

- 75 The Authority's leadership is continuing to implement changes agreed by the Authority but some of the planned changes have proved difficult to implement and, although officers and members have taken difficult decisions, ongoing challenges remain.
- 76 We outlined in our Performance Audit Work plan that we would follow up issues raised with us in correspondence. This work has now been completed and our findings are that the issues raised with us are unsubstantiated. The areas raised included:
- impropriety around the use of lease cars and fuel;
 - nature and detail of information supplied to the Authority on which to make decisions and to keep them updated on outcomes of previous decisions and other matters;
 - application of disciplinary procedures;
 - senior officer salaries and allowances;
 - use of 'gagging clauses';
 - employment issues including compliance with working time directive, equality impact assessments and redeployment processes; and
 - questions about the Constitution and how the Authority undertakes its business.

- 77 In the course of investigating these issues, we reviewed reports of various organisations with whom similar, and in some cases, the same issues had been raised including the Technical Advisory Panel, the Health and Safety Executive, VOSA (Vehicle and Operator Services Agency) and outcomes from Employment Tribunals. These independent sources also found the issues raised to be unsubstantiated.
- 78 Whilst it is not unexpected that an Authority will need to deal with complaints and dissatisfaction as part of its routine business, and it is wholly appropriate for those people who have reason to believe that impropriety has taken place to raise issues, the time taken by the Authority in dealing with the same and similar complaints distracts from its day to day duties in a way which represents an inefficient use of time. The Authority needs to also consider how it deals with complaints in light of the ongoing financial pressures and challenging decision making that will be required in the future.
- 79 Given that the Authority is planning to continue changes to its operational arrangements, both members and officers should together explore the reasons for the lack of confidence in decision making evidenced by the volume of issues raised, and look for ways to better communicate its decisions and the rationale for its decisions. As an example, the decision to procure Rural Response Pumps to replace some standard fire appliances across the fleet, and in crewing changes at Llanelli has placed considerable demands on the Authority, and extensive time and resources has been spent dealing with opposition to the plans, which slows the potential pace of change across the Authority.
- 80 The Authority also needs to determine how its change management and governance arrangements can be enhanced to provide support to senior officers implementing new ways of working and to show collective ownership of decision making. This could include:
- improving the quality of minute taking at meetings;
 - maintaining an effective media and communications strategy at all levels to provide effective reassurance to the public that agreed change is necessary and to adequately inform the public of the risk profile that the change will produce;
 - reviewing how relations with its external stakeholders can be developed, so that whilst decisions may be challenged, this can be done in an environment where a common set of values has been agreed;
 - reviewing whether current delegated decision making arrangements are appropriate (both now and in light of any future changes as a result of the Commission on Public Service Governance and Delivery Report, January 2014); and
 - considering external mediation or facilitation and advice where necessary.

- 81 Despite external challenge the crewing changes agreed by the Authority have now been implemented. This is delivering cost savings whilst operational resilience has been maintained. It has also included developing better evaluation and communication arrangements as an improvement objective for 2014-15.

The Authority is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2014-15 if it is able to address the challenges in implementing planned changes

82 Based on the conclusions outlined in the previous sections of this report the Auditor General believes that Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority is likely to meet the requirements of the Measure in making arrangements to secure continuous improvement if it is able to address the challenges in implementing planned changes.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Status of this report

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) requires the Auditor General to undertake an annual improvement assessment, and to publish an annual improvement report, for each improvement authority in Wales. This requirement covers local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

This report has been produced by the staff of the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General to discharge his duties under section 24 of the Measure. The report also discharges his duties under section 19 to issue a report certifying that he has carried out an improvement assessment under section 18 and stating whether, as a result of his improvement plan audit under section 17, he believes that the improvement authority has discharged its improvement planning duties under section 15.

Improvement authorities are under a general duty to ‘make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions’.

The annual improvement assessment is the main piece of work that enables the Auditor General to fulfil his duties. The improvement assessment is a forward-looking assessment of an authority’s likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. It also includes a retrospective assessment of whether an authority has achieved its planned improvements in order to inform a view as to the authority’s track record of improvement. The Auditor General will summarise his audit and assessment work in a published Annual Improvement Report for each authority (under section 24).

The Auditor General may also in some circumstances carry out special inspections (under section 21), which will be reported to the authority and Ministers, and which he may publish (under section 22). An important ancillary activity for the staff of the Wales Audit Office is the co-ordination of assessment and regulatory work (required by section 23), which takes into consideration the overall programme of work of all relevant regulators at an improvement authority. The Auditor General may also take account of information shared by relevant regulators (under section 33) in his assessments.

Appendix 2

Useful information about Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

The Authority

The Authority has to perform all the duties and responsibilities in accordance with appropriate legislation and regulations. There are three important pieces of law relating to fire authorities:

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

The Act requires all fire authorities to make provision for fire fighting, which means not only putting out fires but also protecting life and property in case of fire. It also makes provision for attending road traffic collisions and other emergencies as well as community safety activities.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (FSO) 2005

The Order came into force on 1 October 2006, and replaced over 70 separate pieces of fire safety legislation. The requirement for businesses to have fire certificates was abolished. The FSO applies to all non-domestic premises in England and Wales, including the common parts of blocks of flats and houses in multiple occupation. It gives responsibility to those who are best placed to address fire safety and ensure that risks are kept under review. Under the Order the Responsible Person³ is required to carry out a fire risk assessment and put in place appropriate fire safety measures to minimise the risk to life from fire; and to keep the assessment up to date. The Order is enforced by Fire and Rescue Authorities who are expected to develop appropriate risk based inspection regimes.

Civil Contingencies Act 2004

The Act delivers a single framework for civil protection in the United Kingdom capable of meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. The Act is divided into two parts; Part 1 which defines the obligations of certain organisations to prepare for various types of emergencies and Part 2 which provides additional powers for the Government to use in the event of a large scale emergency. Under the Act fire and rescue services are defined as Category 1 Responders and as such have six specific duties to deliver:

- assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning;
- put in place emergency plans;
- put in place Business Continuity Management arrangements;
- put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency;
- share information with other local responders to enhance co-ordination; and

³ Communities and Local Government Fire Safety Law and Guidance documents for business states that the law applies if you are: responsible for business premises, an employer or self-employed with business premises, responsible for a part of a dwelling where that part is solely used for business purposes, a charity or voluntary organisation, a contractor with a degree of control over any premises, providing accommodation for paying guests.

- co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency.

There is an additional duty placed on local authorities to provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management. Local fire and rescue services can be called upon to assist in this role.

Category 2 organisations include organisations such as the Health and Safety Executive, transport and utility companies. Category 1 and 2 organisations form Local Resilience Forums (which are co-terminus with police areas) which will help co-ordination and co-operation between responders at the local level.

The Authority is funded directly by its constituent local authorities based on the registered electorate in each area. It comprises 25 councillors from the six unitary authorities of Mid and West Wales. The number of representatives from each constituent authority is determined by the number of registered local government electors in each area.

The Authority's annual revenue budget for 2013-2014 is £43.9 million. In the same year the Authority also had a capital budget of £4.3 million. This equates to about £49 per resident.

The current Chairman of the Fire and Rescue Authority is Councillor Roy Llewellyn.

The Authority acts as the main policy making body and governs the adoption of various working practices in line with statutory guidelines laid down by the Welsh Government. It meets on a quarterly basis and its work is supported by four main committees; namely Performance, Audit and Scrutiny; Resource Management; Standards; and Remuneration. All of these groups meet regularly to consider issues within their areas of responsibility. Meetings are open to the public, and records of the Authority's transactions are available from the Authority's website.

The Service is led and managed by Christopher Davies, Chief Fire Officer, supported by the Executive Board that consists of the Chief Fire Officer and Principal Officers who lead service directorates.

For more information see the Authority's own website at www.mawwfire.gov.uk or contact the Authority at Authority Headquarters, Lime Grove Avenue, Carmarthen, SA31 1SP.

Appendix 3

Appointed Auditor's Annual Audit Letter

Richard Smith
Chief Fire Officer
Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
Lime Grove Avenue
Carmarthen
SA31 1SP

Dear Richard

Annual Audit Letter

This letter summarises the key messages arising from my statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 as the Appointed Auditor and my reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice.

The Authority complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources

It is the Authority's responsibility to:

- put systems of internal control in place to ensure the regularity and lawfulness of
- transactions and to ensure that its assets are secure;
- maintain proper accounting records;
- accordance with relevant requirements; and
- establish and keep under review appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency
- and effectiveness in its use of resources.

The Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 requires me to:

- provide an audit opinion on the accounting statements;
- review the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its
- use of resources; and
- issue a certificate confirming that I have completed the audit of the accounts.

Local authorities in Wales prepare their accounting statements in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. This Code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards. On 25 September 2013 I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements stating that they present a true and fair view of the Authority's and the Pension Fund's financial position and transactions. My report is contained within the Statement of Accounts. The key matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to members of the Audit Committee in my Audit of Financial Statements report on the 23 September 2013, and a more detailed report will follow in due course.

My consideration of the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness is based on the audit work undertaken on the accounts as well as placing reliance on the work completed as part of the Improvement Assessment under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

I am not yet in a position to certify the closure of the audit for 2012/13 or to provide my overall consideration of the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness until I have completed my consideration of matters brought to my attention by local authority electors.

The financial audit fee for 2012-13 is currently expected to be in line with the agreed fee set out in the Annual Audit Outline. There will be additional fees arising from the need to deal with the matters brought to my attention by local authority electors.

Yours sincerely

Virginia Stevens

For and on behalf of the Appointed Auditor
28 November 2013

cc. Elizabeth Aitken, Deputy Chief Officer

Appendix 4

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's improvement objectives and self-assessment

The Authority's improvement objectives

The Authority is required by the Welsh Government to make plans to improve its functions and the services it provides. Each year it must publish these plans along with specific 'improvement objectives' that set out the key things that the Authority intends to do to improve. The Authority must do this as soon as reasonably practicable after 31 December of the year prior to the financial year to which the plan relates (the policy intention is that FRAs will publish between 1 January and 31 March).

The Authority published its improvement objectives for 2014-15 on the [Authority's website](#).

They are:

| Improvement Objectives 2012-13 | Improvement Objectives 2013-14 | Improvement Objectives 2014-15 |
|---|---|--|
| Managing Risk That children and young people in Mid and West Wales are safe and responsible citizens. | Managing Risk Citizens and communities of Mid and West Wales and those who visit our area are safe. | Improving our Internal and External Communication / Engagement Staff, Communities and Stakeholders feel better informed and aware of what we do and how well we do it. |
| Managing People A workforce that is multi-skilled, competent, safe and flexible and meets the needs of our communities. | Managing People A workforce that is multi-skilled, competent, safe and flexible and meets the needs of our communities. | Manage Reduced Budgets to support safer communities To continue making communities safer through minimising risks and maintaining our standards of service delivery within a reduced budget. |
| Working Together That vulnerable citizens live safely in our communities. | Working Together That vulnerable citizens live safely in our communities. | Improve our Evaluation Process The Service understands how our actions deliver better outcomes for our communities to inform future planning and improve the services we deliver. |

| Improvement Objectives 2012-13 | Improvement Objectives 2013-14 | Improvement Objectives 2014-15 |
|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| <p>Managing Resources A high performing and efficient Service, managing resources effectively and delivering excellent value for money to our communities.</p> | <p>Managing Resources That communities receive value for money.</p> | |
| | <p>Managing Performance That communities and citizens feel informed, safe and have confidence in the Services we provide.</p> | |

The Authority's self-assessment of performance

The Authority's self-assessment of its performance during 2012-13 can be found on the [Authority's website](#).

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