

Report to	<b>Audit Committee</b>
Date	<b>17 June 2024</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer</b>
Subject	<b>Governance Arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services in Wales</b>



## **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1 To bring to Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) attention the work being undertaken to research and evaluate appropriate governance arrangements around Fire and Rescue Services in Wales.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2 Members should be aware of the ongoing debate around appropriate governance arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services in Wales. This report presents to Members the intentions of the Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Local Government and Planning, who is also responsible for Fire and Rescue in Wales, and directs them to the opinions and recommendations of the Equalities and Social Justice Committee published on 6 June 2024.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

- 3 That Members note:
  - i) The work initiated by the Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Local Government and Planning with the South Wales Local Authorities; and
  - ii) The second part of the report published by the Equality and Social Justice Committee's report setting out their opinions for change to the governance arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services in Wales.

## **INFORMATION**

- 4 The existing governance arrangements for Fire and Rescue Services in Wales were established through the three Combination Orders in 1996. These established the current three Fire Authorities and the pooled funding mechanism via a levy from each constituent Local Authorities.

- 5 This is just one model of governance, but is at least consistent across the whole of Wales. Traditionally there have been a number of models of governance for Fire and Rescue Services in the U.K., such as County Council model, Combined Authorities and Metropolitan Authorities. In recent years this has further fragmented with Mayoral models, Police, Crime and Fire Commissioners, Corporate Sole in London and Boards in Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- 6 Over the years there has been some debate as to whether the current model in Wales is suitable for the future and this culminated in a White Paper in 2018. Ultimately it was decided to remain with the current governance model but to undertake further work around funding, which did not progress due to Covid.
- 7 This issue has been resurrected as a result of the Independent review into Culture in South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and the Welsh Government's decision to intervene by replacing the Fire Authority with Commissioners.
- 8 The Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Local Government and Planning has recently written to the Council Leaders in South Wales setting out her desire to work "collectively to develop a new, clearer and more effective governance model" for Fire and Rescue Services. Please see Appendix 1. In her letter she has posed seven questions to prompt the thought process. This letter has also been copied to the Leaders of all the Councils in Wales.
- 9 On the 6 June 2024, the Equality and Social Justice Scrutiny Committee published its report entitled "[Sound the Alarm: The Governance of Fire and Rescue Services](#)". The last twenty pages reflects their opinions around governance arrangements.
- 10 In addition, Audit Wales are in the process of writing a report to reflect their own observations around governance arrangements and this will be shared with Members once it is published.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

Well-being Objectives	Good governance enables delivery of our Well-being Objectives.
Budget	As yet, these are unknown.
Legal	Any change in the Combination Order will require primary legislation.
Staffing	No known staffing considerations.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	No known issues arising.
Risks	Risk of time and resources being redirected to developing and testing alternative models of governance versus failure in good governance