



North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Findings and conclusions

WFG examination and audit of partnerships and collaborations

April 2019

Steve Frank, Euros Lake and Ron Price

The Auditor General's responsibilities under the Act

The Auditor General must...

1. Examine public bodies to assess the extent to which they have acted in accordance with the Sustainable Development Principle when:
 - setting well-being objectives
 - taking steps to meet them

Overall question for this Examination:

To what extent has North Wales FRA acted in accordance with the sustainable development principle when undertaking the step relating to Partnership working including 'partnership working involved in undertaking Safe and Well visits, and the Arson Reduction Team'.

Our Examinations approach

Our audit approach included:

- early fieldwork scoping meetings in August and tailored project brief;
- involving the FRAs in deciding the two partnerships to be examined and in the design of the survey; and
- integrated WFG fieldwork with audit of partnerships and collaborations.

Then we:

- reviewed documentation;
- undertook eight interviews, including Senior Officers, Authority members, and a staff focus group;
- attendance at a Safe and Well visit; and
- we propose to feedback the findings through a Feedback and Response Workshop.

Brief overview of the step being reviewed

We:

- reviewed documentation and supplemented what we already know
- reviewed the FRA websites in line with [making-your-service-accessible](#)
- carrying out a partnership survey with key partners of two partnerships:
 - SWFRA: Safe & Well and Arson reduction, NWFRA: Safe & Well and Arson reduction, and MWWFRA: Fire Control project and partnership with Pembrokeshire and Carmarthenshire Councils
- focused our examination on a small number of steps that help meet one collaboration related Well-being Objective

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority – Strategic context and risks

- North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is making clear and steady progress in delivering the aims and aspiration in the FRS National Framework 2016
- Ensuring appropriate resilience in on call (RDS) duty systems is a longer term aspiration and necessity
- Making community resilience a reality includes developing a better shared understanding about what this looks like and what communities need to be more self sufficient
- Evolving role of firefighter – eg growing prevention focus, etc.
- Longer-term agreement and collaboration with the Unions about the direction of travel will ensure better resilience and enable longer-term workforce planning, eg on Safe and Well visits, terms and conditions harmonisation
- Better Data management and insight offers significant opportunities to reduce risk and direct scarce resources
- Good asset management will require significant investment over the longer term
- Deeper collaboration and data sharing with social services will maximise the benefits of home fire safety checks and evolution to Safe and Well visits
- Making the Welsh Government's Reform Agenda a reality includes risks and opportunities

Overall conclusions to WFG examination and audit of partnerships 2018-19

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) has positive examples of how it has taken account of the Sustainable Development Principle when taking steps to meet objectives but further work is required to widen and mainstream how it is delivering the five ways of working.

- The Authority has a track record of **long-term** prevention activity driven by good use of data but there are opportunities to improve the long-term focus on other aspects of its funding, planning and collaboration work.
- **Integration** is progressing slowly and needs to move from commitment to integrating plans and strategies particularly with Health and the Ambulance Service.
- The Authority has some positive examples of how it **involves** communities in reducing arson and deliberate fire setting but has more work to do to mainstream involvement in all its work.
- The Authority can demonstrate the positive impact of its **collaborations** with some key partners but needs to develop and strengthen its relationships and contribution to the objectives of wider partnerships.
- **Prevention** is at the heart of the work of FRAs and the Authority has good examples of its positive work. Strengthening evaluation will help avoid duplication and maximise impact.

Corporate Arrangements relating to WFG examination 2018-19

Strengths

- A history and track record of long-term programmes of home fire safety checks and prevention activity focused on reducing death and injury in the home
- Good use of available data to enable a risk-based approach in collaboration with partners
- Significant commitment to educational campaigns aligned with national publicity initiatives
- Integration and reduction of high level strategic themes and steps
- Examples of involving partners to target the vulnerable
- Willingness to establish contractual arrangements to strengthen internal capacity with a value for money focus – eg asset management and financial services procured on a long-term basis

Corporate Arrangements relating to WFG examination 2018-19

Areas for improvement

- Financial constraints limit the ability of the Authority to implement some non-statutory aspects of potential prevention work
- More scope to make use of data around vulnerability, social exclusion and isolation to further target key risks
- Systematic evaluation of prevention initiatives will help pinpoint impact
- Co-location effective but more scope to share data with partners
- Least visible progress is in improving involvement and making the results of engagement a strategic resource
- Capacity issues caused by servicing PSBs needs to be managed

Positive indicators for Long-Term

What would show a body is fully applying the long-term way of working?

- There is a clear understanding of what 'long-term' means in the context of the Act.
- They have designed the step to deliver the well-being objective/s and contribute to their long-term vision.
- They have designed the step to deliver short or medium term benefits, which are balanced with the impact over the long-term (within the project context).
- They have designed the step based on a sophisticated understanding of current and future need and pressures, including analysis of future trends.
- Consequently, there is a comprehensive understanding of current and future risks and opportunities.
- Resources have been allocated to ensure long-term as well as short-term benefits are delivered.
- There is a focus on delivering outcomes, with milestones/progression steps identified where outcomes will be delivered over the long-term.
- They are open to new ways of doing things which could help deliver benefits over the longer term.
- They value intelligence and pursue evidence-based approaches.

Overall conclusions

Long-term

The Authority has a track record of long-term prevention activity driven by good use of data but there are opportunities to improve the long-term focus on other aspects of its funding, planning and collaboration work.

Strengths

- A history and track record of long-term programmes of arson reduction has supported a downward trend in fire incidents, death and injury
- Planning for appropriate long-term activity of prevention work is based on good data, information and a focus on vulnerability and risk
- Effective focus on long-term prevention activity through evolution of Home Fire Safety Checks (HFSCS) into Safe and Well type visits
- Focus on long-term effects of climate change and clear consideration of wider social value from arson/deliberate fire setting reduction
- Investment in data quality and baselines of activity – staff and arson reduction team have access to Police data systems

Overall conclusions

Long-term

The Authority has a track record of long-term prevention activity driven by good use of data but there are opportunities to improve the long-term focus on other aspects of its funding, planning and collaboration work.

Areas for Development

- Challenge to the Authority of short-term funding (Welsh Government and annual budgets) can impact on services and ability to plan in the long-term.
- Reduction of grant funding has a direct influence on capacity to commit to long-term prevention activity.
- Trend data good but more to do on forecasting internal and external data – workforce planning, social change, community resilience, etc.

Positive indicators for Integration

What would show a body is taking an 'integrated' approach?

- **Individuals at all levels understand their contribution to the delivery of the vision and well-being objectives.**
- **Individuals at all levels understand what different parts of the organisation do and proactively seek opportunities to work across organisational boundaries. This is replicated in their work with other public bodies.**
- **Individuals at all levels recognise the cross-organisation dependencies of achieving the ambition and objectives.**
- **There is an open culture where information is shared.**
- **There is a well-developed understanding of how the well-being objectives and steps to meet them impact on other public sector bodies.**
- **Individuals proactively work across organisational boundaries to maximise their contribution across the well-being goals and minimise negative impacts.**
- **Governance, structures and processes support this, as do behaviours.**

Overall conclusions

Integration

Integration is progressing slowly and needs to move from commitment to actual integration of plans, strategies and activity.

Strengths

- Integration and reduction of high level strategic themes – the Authority has halved the number of well-being/improvement objectives compared to 2016-17.
- Significant commitment to engage the service's actions with Public Service Board partners.
- Some good examples of aligned activity for arson reduction and Safe and Well visit activity.

Overall conclusions

Integration

Integration is progressing slowly and needs to move from commitment to actual integration of plans, strategies and activity.

Areas for Development

- Scope to further integrate plans and strategies to ensure that there is recognition of how to meet National Wellbeing goals.
- Capacity issues of servicing several PSBs needs to be managed.
- Benefits from involvement in the PSBs across North Wales have yet to be translated into fully integrated responses by public bodies despite willingness to work in this way by the Fire and Rescue Service.

Overall conclusions

Integration

Integration is progressing slowly and needs to move from commitment to actual integration of plans, strategies and activity.

Areas for Development

- Integration with health services remains a challenge and co-ordinating and actions to support objectives is not yet fully developed. Hospital discharge and joint visits with social workers are two examples of positive integration to build on.
- Despite co-location with the Ambulance service, the Authority could do more to demonstrate how it harmonises its objectives with those of its partners, and articulate how integration produces better outcomes.

Positive indicators for Involvement

What would show a body is involving people effectively?

- Having an understanding of who needs to be involved and why.
- Reflecting on how well the needs and challenges facing those people are currently understood.
- Working co-productively, working with stakeholders to design and deliver.
- Seeing the views of stakeholders as vital sources of information that will help deliver better outcomes.
- Ensuring that the full diversity of stakeholders are represented and they are able to take part.
- Having mature and trusting relationships with its stakeholders where there is ongoing dialogue and information is shared in an open and transparent way.
- Ensure stakeholders understand the impact of their contribution.
- Seek feedback from key stakeholders which is used to help learn and improve.

Overall conclusions

Involvement

The Authority has some positive examples of how it involves communities in reducing arson and deliberate fire setting but has more work to do to mainstream involvement in all its work.

Strengths

- Significant involvement with communities and citizens through on call firefighters and the communities where they live and work.
- Some good work with the third sector on a wide range of initiatives focused on vulnerability and protected characteristics.
- Post Incident feedback and significant interaction with people through home visits focused on achieving the Authority's Wellbeing Objectives.

Overall conclusions

Involvement

The Authority has some positive examples of how it involves communities in reducing arson and deliberate fire setting but has more work to do to mainstream involvement in all its work.

Strengths

- Significant range of educational activities.
- Significant levels of referrals from partner agencies with appropriate 'triage' arrangements to prioritise based on risk.
- A focus on 'Making Every Contact Count' with involvement and engagement with communities and individuals.

Overall conclusions

Involvement

The Authority has some positive examples of how it involves communities in reducing arson and deliberate fire setting but has more work to do to mainstream involvement in all its work.

Areas for Development

- Making involvement and engagement a strategic resource to aid improvement to shape service delivery and to ensure that the full diversity of stakeholders are represented.
- The Authority's approach to involvement remains focused on consultation. It seeks to work with communities and citizens around its corporate plans and objectives, but the response is limited.

Positive indicators for Collaboration

What would show a body is collaborating effectively?

- The body is focused on place, community and outcomes rather than organisational boundaries.
- The body has a good understanding of partners' objectives and their responsibilities, which helps to drive collaborative activity.
- The body has positive and mature relationships with stakeholders, where information is shared in an open and transparent way.
- The body recognises and values the contributions that all partners can make.
- The body seeks to establish shared processes and ways of working, where appropriate.

Overall conclusions

Collaboration

The Authority can demonstrate the positive impact of its collaborations with some key partners but needs to develop and strengthen its relationships and contribution to the objectives of wider partnerships.

Strengths

- Collaboration supports corporate capacity in key areas through external parties with long standing contractual arrangements.
- Examples of targeting and prioritising vulnerable people through partnerships
- Effective collaboration with Police Service through seconded Officer resource to Arson reduction team
- Access to national Occupational Therapist has increased capacity to the Arson reduction Team
- Local campaigns are linked to National Fire Safety Campaigns

Overall conclusions

Collaboration

The Authority can demonstrate the positive impact of its collaborations with some key partners but needs to develop and strengthen its relationships and contribution to the objectives of wider partnerships.

Areas for Development

- Strategic approach to collaborations needs clarity and exit strategies.
- Clarity needed to support the rationale for Safe and Well visits to avoid duplication with other services (eg health and social services).
- Greater clarity around vulnerability criteria with partners required to better target highest risks.
- Lots of co-location but some partners not always sharing data.
- Inconsistent approaches from the four PSBs limit effectiveness.
- Pace of collaboration with Ambulance services seen as 'frustrating'. Opportunities to work closer with Health Boards on risks associated with hospital discharges.

Partnership Survey

- North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (NWFRA)
 - Arson Reduction Team
 - Safe and Well Visits
- Nine respondents across both partnerships.

Key survey findings

- Partners surveyed believe the Authority and its partners have a good mutual understanding on areas ranging from understanding of the local context and environment in which partners operate, to their culture and how needs are identified.
- The majority of partners value the Authority's commitment to partnership working.
- Some comments suggest the FRA only becomes involved with partners once a major fire has occurred in North Wales.
- We received positive responses from partners on the Authority's clarity of purpose and objectives when it comes to partnership working. Despite this, the responses show potential room for improvement in how the Authority involves partners in designing new services and how it provides opportunities for people to have their say on partnerships and collaborations.

Key survey findings

- Some good examples were provided on how the Authority ensures accountability for its partnership activities, particularly in relation to the Arson Reduction Team.
- We received fewer positive responses in relation to the Authority's resources and capacity to service and maintain partnerships. This includes individuals with responsibilities for partnership work having sufficient time allocated to them to undertake the work required, and working with partners to address any shortfalls in partnership funding or capacity.
- Despite this, partners highlight positive examples of partnership working improving the joint use of resources (eg tackling deliberate vehicle fires in the Caia Park area in Wrexham).

Key survey findings

- Most partners believe the Authority has appropriate processes in place to scrutinise and judge partners' performance, although there are fewer positive responses on whether the Authority learns from past experiences when it comes to partnership working.
- Comments suggest partners value the working relationships with Authority staff. Examples cited include officers' willingness to undertake Safe and Well Visits on short-notice and their can-do attitude.

Positive indicators for Prevention

What would show a body is fully applying the preventative way of working?

- The body seeks to understand the root causes of problems so that negative cycles and intergenerational challenges can be tackled.
- The body sees challenges from a system-wide perspective, recognising and valuing the long-term benefits that they can deliver for people and places.
- The body allocates resources to preventative action that is likely to contribute to better outcomes and use of resources over the longer-term, even where this may limit the ability to meet some short-term needs.
- There are decision-making and accountability arrangements that recognise the value of preventative action and accept short-term reductions in performance and resources in the pursuit of anticipated improvements in outcomes and use of resources.

Overall conclusions

Prevention

Prevention is at the heart of the work of FRAs and the Authority has good examples of its positive work. Strengthening evaluation will help avoid duplication and maximise impact.

Strengths

- Further shift towards prevention in Safe and Well visits, arson reduction and road safety activity, learning about preventing of wildfires.
- Significant commitment to educational campaigns seeking to change behaviour and perception and prevent arson.
- A long-standing focus on addressing fire deaths and the changing patterns of risk has been in place through many years supported by sound leadership.
- New website includes vast amount of information on improving community resilience and preventing fires and other emergencies.

Overall conclusions

Prevention

Prevention is at the heart of the work of FRAs and the Authority has good examples of its positive work. Strengthening evaluation will help avoid duplication and maximise impact.

Strengths

- Well developed approach to other societal issues – Violence against women, isolation, diversity and equality considerations, fly-tipping and waste disposal, adult and children safeguarding, smoking cessation and anti-social behaviour.
- Working towards changing the perception of deliberate fire setting with its holistic approach to tackling the issue – an example of the Authority's understanding of root causes of problems to target prevention.

Overall conclusions

Prevention

Prevention is at the heart of the work of FRAs and the Authority has good examples of its positive work. Strengthening evaluation will help avoid duplication and maximise impact.

Areas for Development

- Systematic evaluation of prevention initiatives will help pinpoint impact.
- Clarity about the role of Safe and Well visits to avoid duplication with health and social services is required.
- Differing approaches on the use of prevention data and information across the three Welsh FRAs.