

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	20 January 2025
Lead Officer	Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Helen MacArthur, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Subject	Independent Cultural Review Update



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) with a progress report into the cultural review which was commissioned from the independent consultancy firm Crest Advisory in July 2024.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 In recent years, there has been concern around fostering a positive culture across both the private and public sectors. North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) has been on its own cultural journey during the last three years and following the publication of the review into South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS), it was agreed with the Deputy Minister to commission a review to understand where the Service is on that journey and to devise recommendations to continue on that trajectory of improvement.
- 3 An independent review has been undertaken by Crest Advisory and the report will be published on 27 January 2025.

RECOMMENDATION

- 4 It is recommended that Members:
 - i) Note the progress of the Independent Cultural Review and the timescales for publication contained in the report; and
 - ii) agree to nominate representatives of the Authority to attend a webinar with Crest to discuss the findings of the review and recommendations for the future.

BACKGROUND

- 5 Upon her appointment in July 2021, the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) embarked on a comprehensive tour, visiting every fire station and department to talk directly with employees and their representatives. Her situational assessment, presented to Members of the Authority in September 2021, identified key risks including firefighter availability in rural areas, the provision of training and corporate capacity.
- 6 Whilst culture was not initially highlighted as a major issue, Members supported the CFO's proposal for an independent cultural survey known as the Fire Family Staff Survey which established a baseline assessment of culture within the Service.
- 7 An action plan was formulated based on the original 2021 survey results leading to significant efforts to enhance organisational culture. The progress made over a 24-month period was then reassessed through another independent Fire Family Staff Survey in September 2023, with the findings reported at a Members' Cultural Seminar in February 2024
- 8 In the meantime, on 3 January 2024, the Independent Cultural Review into SWFRS was published. In response to those findings the Deputy Minister, Hannah Blythyn, announced the removal of South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and the appointment of four Commissioners in their place.
- 9 Following those Ministerial actions, the Chair of the Authority and Chief Fire Officer met with the then Deputy Minister and her officials to discuss progress made around culture within the Service. The Deputy Minister had previously met with employees of the Service both formally and informally and had formed the opinion that both North Wales and Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service (MAWWFRS) were in a different place on their cultural journeys to SWFRS.
- 10 In consultation with the Deputy Minister NWFRS and MAWWFRS suggested that they should both commission another external review by an organisational culture specialist. The terms of reference for these reviews were agreed based upon the Deputy Minister's statement in the Senedd.

INFORMATION

- 11 Following a procurement exercise, Crest Advisory were appointed in July 2024 to undertake two separate independent reviews in both NWFRS and MAWWFRS.

- 12 The work undertaken by Crest Advisory started with a document review followed by a desk top review of processes around people management.
- 13 They facilitated a staff survey and written submissions for all employees and those former employees who had worked for the Service within the last three years.
- 14 Staff and eligible former staff were offered the opportunity to take part in confidential one-to-one interviews and focus groups. These were held during the months of October and November 2024. In total there were 59 people who expressed an interest and all were accommodated.
- 15 A report has been drafted based upon their findings during this period and the final report and identified areas for improvement from Crest, the independent culture specialist, will be published on 27 January 2025. It is likely to generate some media interest and so we have arranged for external and internal communications on that day in conjunction with partners such as the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and Welsh Government.
- 16 Importantly, we have put in place extensive support for those employees who may be impacted by the findings.
- 17 Crest Advisory will present their findings to Members of the Authority and the Welsh Government, and Members are asked to make themselves available for this opportunity in early February. This will ensure that we continue to foster a positive culture within the Service that enables us to serve our community with pride and professionalism.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	
Budget	The cost of the review was not funded by Welsh Government and was an additional pressure on the 2024/25 budget.
Legal	This review was commissioned by the Service and does not form part of any national inspection arrangements.
Staffing	Staff have been reallocated from their duties to support the review. However, this is seen as an investment for the future of the Service.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The review has been conducted in both Welsh and English and the report will be published bilingually.
Risks	There is a recognised balance between the possible short term reputational and financial risks against the long term workforce risks.