WALES AUDIT OFFICE

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Author: Janet Villars **Ref: 353A2011**

Technology – Themed Review Feedback

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Contents

Summary

1. Effective use of technology is essential for transforming the delivery of public services, improving outcomes for citizens and delivering efficiency savings. Technology can support different ways of working, delivering services and engaging with citizens, enabling fire authorities to deliver more for less. The way in which technology is delivered and managed has a direct impact on the efficiency, effectiveness and quality of work undertaken across the Authority. Poor ICT governance can lead to the use of inappropriate systems, system unavailability and frustration throughout the Authority.

2. In 2010, the Wales Audit Office identified through its improvement assessment work that many authorities were grappling with ensuring technology was used effectively to support service transformation and achieve efficiency savings, and as a result, reviews of technology are being undertaken at all fire and rescue authorities in Wales.

3. This review sought to answer the question: 'Are the Authority's arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology likely to support continuous improvement?' Our review of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) concluded that:

   • The Authority's current arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support continuous improvement. The Authority understands how technology can help it secure sustainable, effective use of technology, deliver efficiencies and transform service delivery, but it needs to ensure that it has capacity in terms of technical skilled resources to deliver its plans without impacting on the quality of service.

4. Our findings, conclusions, and proposals for improvement are outlined in the table below.
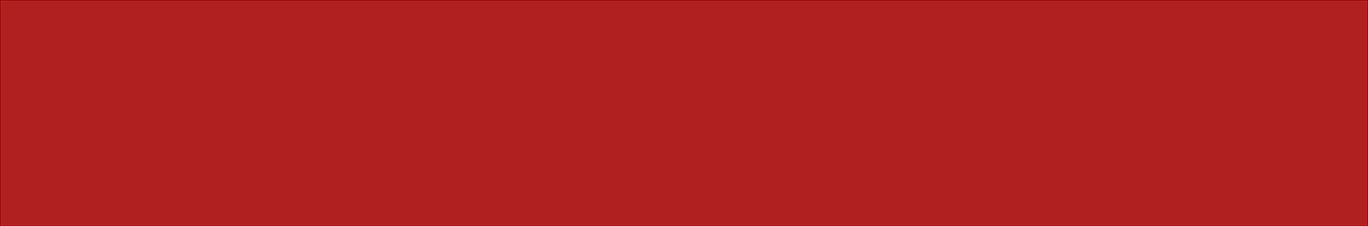
High-level questions and findings

High Level Question	Are the Authority's arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology likely to support continuous improvement?
High Level Answer: **We have concluded that:**	The Authority's current arrangements for developing, using and supporting technology are likely to support continuous improvement. The Authority understands how technology can help it secure sustainable, effective use of technology, deliver efficiencies and transform service delivery but it needs to ensure that it has capacity in terms of technical, skilled resources to deliver its plans without affecting the quality of service.
Assessment of Current Arrangements	The arrangements are broadly sound. There is scope for minor improvements but these are either already in hand or are not significant enough to warrant urgent action.
Assessment of Performance	There are weaknesses in some aspects of performance, which need to be addressed, but other aspects are acceptable with signs of improvement.
Proposals for Improvement	R1 Develop a new five-year ICT strategy to support the Authority's current and future requirements identified through engagement and consultation with key service stakeholders. R2 Document, publish and promote technology standards and policies. R3 Ensure that the Authority has the ICT skills and capacity to support and develop technology without adversely impacting on service quality. R4 Use technology to optimise and standardise business processes and procedures. R5 The Authority needs to put in place arrangements to monitor and measure the effectiveness and impact of technology and service user satisfaction.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
Are the Authority's technology plans likely to support its improvement priorities?	Yes	• The Authority's ICT governance arrangements support the development and exploitation of technology and underpin its improvement objectives. • The Authority is reviewing and developing its ICT Strategy for the next five years, to support and underpin its improvement priorities and align with the Wales ICT Strategy principles and has engaged with service users as part of the process. • The Authority fully accepts that investment in technology can help it achieve service transformation. • The Authority has a sound basis for identifying and agreeing its technology priorities. • The ICT Department has engaged effectively with service users when planning technology improvements. • In developing plans to deliver technology improvement, the Authority evaluates, considers and participates in collaboration and partnership arrangements. • National initiatives and projects have helped improve service delivery but the number and timing of these have affected ICT resources, local priorities and support arrangements.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
Are the Authority's technology delivery arrangements likely to support continuous improvement?	Yes	• The Authority is planning to better utilise its use technology to support the delivery of its strategic outcomes. For several years the focus has been on using technology to support frontline operations at the detriment of developing back-office arrangements.
		• The Authority successfully uses technology to provide different ways for people to engage and interact with it to promote awareness of fire prevention and fire safety.
		• Due to capacity constraints, technology standards and policies are informal and not formally documented.
		• Technology plans have clear and robust links with financial plans but resource plans are less robust.
		• The Authority is not effectively managing the growth in demand for technology. There are ICT skills capacity issues which affect the quality of service provision. The increased use and dependency on technology have not been matched with additional, skilled resources to develop and support technology. Technical Support staff also undertake development work, which is not an effective use of skilled resources to deliver projects or maintain operational standards of delivery.
		• Infrastructure technologies and desktop technology are funded through capital projects. The funding is either provided by the Authority itself or the Welsh Government. Funding is linked to technology refresh plans which are managed by the Head of ICT.
		• The Service treats desk top technology as an Authority commodity, which is an example of good practice.
		• The Authority is effectively managing most technology risks with the exception of skills and capacity.
		• The ICT Service has project management arrangements in place and programme management arrangements are developing and maturing.
		• The Authority is managing its ICT assets effectively.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
Is the Authority using technology as an enabler for transformation and make substantial savings on running costs?	In Part	• The Authority uses central, shared storage technology to store its data and information providing mobile and remote working, resilience and avoiding duplication. • The Authority effectively uses mobile access from fire appliances to enable up-to-date, site-specific information to be made available to crews at an incident, using a model appropriate for its geographical region and the facilities available. • Technology is used for tracking appliances and calculating response times, control room operators can monitor vehicles on maps displayed on screens in control rooms. • Mobile and remote working has been in place for some senior staff but is now being extended to more staff to enable staff to hot desk, work at home, on site, or in homes of members of the public to reduce costs and improve efficiency. • The Authority is planning to increase the use of multi-functional printers to reduce printer numbers and printing costs and also to improve print quality. • The rationalisation of HR and Training back office applications is a priority for the Authority. There are issues of duplication of both functions and data which is causing inefficiencies and compromising data integrity. • The Authority has successfully delivered the Fire Records Management System (Fire RMS) for Fire Safety and Operational service areas. The core RMS system has replaced a plethora of databases. Fire RMS has been integrated with other systems and includes interfaces with the Command and Control system, mobile data system, human resources and exchange 'e-mail' systems. • There has been no corporate approach to standardising and optimising business processes using technology across HR and Training, including the retained duty system. A project based upon 'Lean Systems Thinking' is being undertaken and the Authority is investigating options to improve business processes. • The regional gazetteer is used by multiple systems eg, Command and Control and Fire RMS and has improved the integrity and quality of information. It also supports the national resilience project and is contributing to the development of a national gazetteer: a single national gazetteer of property-based information.

Findings	Yes or No	Because:
Is the Authority using technology as an enabler for transformation and make substantial savings on running costs?		• The Authority has delivered a corporate approach to fire safety and operational records management through the introduction of Fire RMS where it has standardised business processes for county and station staff. Prior to this, there was no corporate approach as counties and stations had different ways of working, and the type and quality of information being recorded were inconsistent. • The Authority has rationalised its infrastructure eg, NWFRS virtual server technology to reduce the number of physical servers and power consumption. • The Authority is fully committed to green IT eg, in addition to rationalising and virtualisation technology its mobile technology and flexible working arrangements ie, working from home or a station close to home address reduces carbon emissions through reduced travel requirements.
Is the Authority effectively monitoring and evaluating technology improvement and performance?	No	• The Authority has an informal and ad hoc approach to monitoring and evaluating technology improvement and performance. The impact of technology is not routinely evaluated and measured as part of project reviews. • Internal customer satisfaction surveys and benchmarking activities are not undertaken. • The Authority has a low level of transactions with the public outside emergency calls and it has not been a priority for it to monitor and manage its access channels. • Technology is effectively scrutinised and the ICT Department has responded positively to external inspection and scrutiny.