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Pages	1 of 5

Dear Simon

Improvement Assessment

I am required, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) to report my audit and assessment work in relation to whether North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) has discharged its duties and met the requirements of the Measure.

Further to my Improvement Assessment letter of 23 October 2012, this letter summarises:

- my views on whether the Authority has discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement reporting;
- my views, on the reliability of the Authority's self-evaluation; and
- my further proposals for improvement and/or recommendations.

I have arrived at my views by:

- reviewing the Authority's Assessment of its Performance produced and published by the Authority by 31 October 2012, in which it reported its performance for 2011-12;
- undertaking interviews with managers and reviewing supporting documents in a sample of the service areas included in the report; and
- testing the reliability of a sample of performance indicators.

Further to this I will undertake more detailed work on the arrangements that support the Authority's performance management and reporting over the following months.

I shall summarise all of my work and that of relevant regulators during 2012-13 and publish an Annual Improvement Report for the Authority by the end of March 2013.

The Authority has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure and has acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance

By publishing its Assessment of Performance by the deadline of 31 October 2012 in an electronic format the Authority has complied with the statutory requirements outlined within the Welsh Government's guidance for the Measure, under Section 15 (7). The Assessment of Performance was approved by the Executive Panel on 15 October 2012 and is available on the Authority's website, both in English and Welsh.

The report contains 10 improvement objectives and supporting actions, covering the period 2011-12. The Authority clearly summarises results and includes sufficient evidence to demonstrate whether or not it has achieved improvement or maintains arrangements to secure continuous improvement.

All statutory performance indicators were included in the report, appropriately assessed by the Authority, and presented in a way we consider to be good practice.

The Authority took positive steps to publicise the availability of its Assessment of Performance

The Authority's report is available in electronic format and it has made it available for public scrutiny by promoting its availability through direct email communication to stakeholders and ensuring it is readily available on the Authority's website (but not on the home page). Copies are available on request from Service Headquarters but reliance on this electronic format may be an issue for some people. Social media, such as Twitter, is used to promote the Assessment of Performance and enable feedback from the public.

The Authority has produced a separate Performance Summary which is clear, easy to understand, reflects progress against the 10 improvement objectives and accurately reflects the full Assessment of Performance report. It shows actions completed and the impact of those actions in terms of outcomes for the public, in a concise way that we consider good practice. The Authority plans to distribute this widely by placing copies in public libraries and council information points, as well as distribution at events (agricultural shows, eisteddfodau, etc) and on the Authority's website (although at the time of writing this letter this had not been completed).

The Authority has produced a more balanced view of its performance in 2011-12

In our Annual Improvement Report (January 2012) we noted that the Authority's Improvement Plan published in October 2011 included an overall assessment of the Authority's progress against its improvement objectives and some comparisons with other organisations but:

- some of the assessments were short and tended to focus on the positive; and
- the report lacked a critical appraisal of how the Authority thinks it has done overall and what it is going to do differently as a result.

The Authority is demonstrating a better level of self-awareness compared to last year by providing a more balanced account of its performance; accounting for its failures to perform, as well as promoting its successes.

The Assessment of Performance describes performance against each of its 10 improvement objectives and includes commentary about ongoing challenges and what the Authority intends to do to address them.

There are clear and unequivocal statements for each improvement objective which give the Authority's view on whether it has or has not been fully achieved.

Although the narrative is long in places, it is easy to read and understand with good explanations of 'technical' language associated with the fire and rescue sector (including a glossary as a separate section). Further refinements to cross-referencing and signposting would clarify links between the 'measures of success' performance indicators and the narrative, and assist the reader 'through' the document.

Performance review is a routine and regular function throughout the organisation, involving managers and members in the assessment and management of performance. Performance results are analysed, with the information being used to identify actions to address areas of weaknesses and future challenges. The preparation of the Assessment of Performance also provides a focus for the Authority to challenge itself, to learn and reflect on its performance, and report on its progress to the public.

The Authority has used a wide range of relevant information to arrive at its conclusions but the use of comparative data is limited

The Authority provided a wide range of evidence to make valid assessments of performance by explaining intentions and providing descriptions of progress.

Our Performance Indicator Audit for 2011-12 found the Authority has reliable systems for making sure the performance indicators it uses in its reports are accurate. The Authority has addressed the issue raised during our 2010-11 Performance Indicator Audit in respect of improving the accuracy of the data held within the Incident Recording System in respect of 'over-the-border' incidents.

The Authority provides data on how well it has performed against the previous four years but does not provide a comparison against its targets for the year. There is no comparison against other Welsh improvement authorities and public bodies (including Welsh fire and rescue authorities) and no comparison with UK-wide fire and rescue authorities (although the Combined Improvement Risk Reduction Plan 2010-11 to 2012-13 available on the Authority's website does contain some comparative data). There is no use of satisfaction or citizens survey information to clarify the views of the wider community in the assessment. The Welsh Government, in its Performance Indicator Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities, also suggests that the following (mainly local) measures should be included:

- performance in respect of road traffic collisions;
- performance in reducing fire fighter operational injuries;
- performance in maintaining operational competence;
- performance against the Welsh Fire and Rescue Authority Equality and Diversity Strategy (although some equality and diversity data is included); and
- performance against the Authority's Welsh Language Scheme.

The Authority's self-assessment process appears relevant to the needs of users. Anticipated outcomes are identified at the front of each section including the proposed action which also helps provide context on why the Authority is taking this work. Actual progress against these planned actions are described and evaluations are outcome-focused meaning that the public should be able to understand the impact of the actions.

Information about collaborations undertaken by the Authority during the year are provided throughout the Assessment of Performance as appropriate. In addition, a separate section describes how and why collaborative work was undertaken and provides further examples of ongoing projects.

Further proposals for improvement/recommendations

One new proposal for improvement is being suggested in this letter. The inclusion of more comparative data will help the Authority to explain its achievements and future challenges. We will continue to monitor and report on the progress made by the Authority in implementing the proposals set out in my previous reports and letters.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Huw Vaughan Thomas', is positioned above the printed name.

HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS

AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES

CC: Carl Sargeant, Minister for Local Government and Communities

Lisa Williams, Performance Audit Lead