

**AWDURDOD TÂN AC ACHUB GOGLEDD CYMRU**



**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

A meeting of the **NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY** will be held on **MONDAY 20 JANUARY 2025** virtually **via Zoom** at **09:30**.

Yours faithfully,  
Gareth Owens  
Clerk

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**AGENDA**

- 1. Apologies**
- 2. Declarations of Interest**
- 3. Notice of Urgent Matters**  
Notice of items which, in the opinion of the Chair, should be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972.
- 4. Minutes of the Fire Authority Meeting held on 21 October 2024**
- 5. Matters Arising**
- 6. Chair's Report**
- 7. Independent Culture Review Update**
- 8. Provisional Outturn 2024-25**
- 9. Emergency Cover Review Update**
- 10. Budget Setting 2025-26**
- 11. Welsh Government Consultation – employee contribution rates for the firefighters' pension scheme**
- 12. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Performance Assessment 23/24**
- 13. Power Decarbonisation Plan**
- 14. Residual Carbon Emissions Plan**
- 15. Urgent Matters**  
To consider any items which the Chair has decided are urgent (pursuant to Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972) and of which substance has been declared under item 2 above.

Cont...

## **PART II**

It is recommended pursuant to Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business because it is likely that there would be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in Paragraph(s) 12 to 18 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**16. None**

## **NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

Minutes of the meeting of **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** held on **Monday 21 October 2024** virtually via **Zoom**. Meeting commenced at **09.30hrs**.

### **Councillor**

Dylan Rees (Chair)  
Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)  
Bryan Apsley  
Carol Beard  
Tina Claydon  
Chrissy Gee  
Alan Hughes  
John Brynmor Hughes  
Gareth R Jones  
John Ifan Jones  
Marc Jones  
Gwynfor Owen  
Beverley Parry-Jones  
Arwyn Herald Roberts  
Austin Roberts  
Gareth A Roberts  
Rondo Roberts  
Paul Rogers  
Gareth Sandilands  
Dale Selvester  
Rob Triggs  
Mark Young

### **Representing**

Anglesey County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Anglesey County Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Denbighshire County Council

### **Also present:**

Dawn Docx	Chief Fire Officer (CFO)
Stewart Forshaw	Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO)
Helen MacArthur	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Justin Evans	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Anthony Jones	Area Manager - Transformation
Dafydd Edwards	Treasurer
Gareth Owens	Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Elgan Roberts	Head of Finance and Procurement
Steve Morris	Head of ICT
Rhian Williams	Deputy Head of Corporate Communications
Natalie Jones	Welsh Language Officer
Euros Lake	Audit Wales
Kieran Vickery	Audit Wales
Carwyn Rees	Audit Wales
Timothy Buckle	Audit Wales
George Jones	Atebol Translation Services
Ellie Williams	Members' Services
Lisa Allington	Members' Services

## 1 APOLOGIES

### **Councillor**

Sharon Doleman  
Chris Hughes

### **Representing**

Conwy County Borough Council  
Conwy County Borough Council

### **ABSENT**

### **Councillor**

Marion Bateman  
Adele Davies-Cooke  
Jeff Evans  
Michelle Walker

### **Representing**

Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Anglesey County Council  
Denbighshire County Council

The above apologies were offered and accepted.

## 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

## 3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 No notice of urgent matters had been received.

## 4 MINUTES OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 15 JULY 2024

4.1 The minutes of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 15 July 2024 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **approve the FRA AGM minutes from 15 July 2024 as a true and correct record of the meeting held.**

## 5 MINUTES OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE MEETING HELD ON 15 JULY 2024

5.1 The minutes of the Authority meeting held on 15 July 2024 were submitted for approval.

5.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **approve the FRA minutes from 15 July 2024 as a true and correct record of the meeting held.**

## **6 MATTERS ARISING**

- 6.1 With regards to Item 7 of the minutes from the Authority's business meeting held on 15 July 2024, AM Anthony Jones was invited to provide Members with an update in relation to the Emergency Cover Review (ECR).
- 6.2 AM Jones confirmed that since the Authority decision on 15 July 2024 to continue working on two of the three research proposals presented to them in relation to the ECR, the ECR Task and Finish Group (the Group) recommenced their work on 5 September. The Chair and Deputy Chair remained the same.
- 6.3 The Group had agreed to break the Authority's recommendations down into three work streams: to develop a new wholetime duty system for Rhyl, Deeside and Wrexham, based on the Scottish five-watch system; to develop a new self-rostering day crewing system based on that of Greater Manchester; and to further develop the SWOT analysis on the implementation of riding a minimum crewing level of four across all wholetime duty system teams.
- 6.4 It was anticipated that the outcomes from the work of the Group would be brought to the Authority in 2025.

## **7 CHIEF FIRE OFFICER'S UPDATE**

- 7.1 The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) provided Members with a verbal update on a number of high-profile issues that Members had previously been provided with information for.
- 7.2 Members were informed that the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (GTI) Report Part II had been released on 4 September, seven years following the tragedy that had claimed 72 lives. This inquiry held implications for the whole of the sector, but those areas that required greater focus were: the collection and sharing of risk information; training Control Operators in mass call handling, something already carried out by the Service; and training on simultaneous evacuation, that being the evacuation of residents at the same time as an organised approach to fighting the fire.
- 7.3 On 8 October 2024, the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor for Wales, Dan Stephens, published a report following his inspection into firefighting techniques in South Wales Fire and Rescue Service. A similar inspection was being conducted into Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service and he would be coming into North Wales Fire and Rescue Service in January to carry out the same review. This was another area which would have implications for training within the Service.

- 7.4 It was expected that the findings of his report would be the same across all three Welsh FRA, as they had been UK-wide, namely that the techniques currently in use and which had been taught for the last twenty years were no longer fit for purpose. This was due to many factors, not least that homes were now better insulated with double glazing fitted as standard, and that the type of furniture and IT equipment now present in most homes were more flammable and burned at a higher temperature than those of twenty years ago.
- 7.5 In his report, the Dan Stephens stated that the techniques currently being taught and used were inappropriate, a statement backed up by research from the USA and Netherlands, and may actually be dangerous to firefighters. His recommendations, which had now been incorporated into the new UK-wide National Operational Guidance, was that old techniques would need to be unlearnt and new techniques taught, resulting in the redesigning and remodelling of many old and outdated Training Centres, including that of our own Service which was 50 years old.
- 7.6 On Monday 7 October, the Social Partnership Forum, chaired by Jane Bryant, the new Minister for Fire and Rescue Services, had taken place. The focus of the meeting had been emergency cover availability in rural areas and it was important that the Minister be sighted and aware of the challenges being faced. The Minister then attended the Senedd on 9 October to receive the 'Sound the Alarm' report from the Equalities and Social Justice Committee which echoed those recommendations made in the Audit Wales report on Governance into FRA. The Minister's response would be going out to consultation in the New Year and would propose a new governance model for all three Welsh FRAs, with the intention of having it in place within the next 12 months.
- 7.7 A Member noted that the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's report highlighted that now was the ideal opportunity to work together to provide the best training facilities possible for Firefighters in North Wales.
- 7.8 Finally, Members were advised that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Stewart Forshaw, had decided to retire at the end of December. The CFO stated that he would be a great loss to the team, and expressed her appreciation of the hard work, energy and commitment he had put in to moving the culture of the Service forward, for asking those questions needed around the deployment of resources, for the improvement he had instigated in the Service's training provision and facilities, and for his Chairing of so many internal meetings which had helped to move the Service forward. The CFO gave her thanks to DCFO Forshaw for everything he had achieved, and wished him well for the future, a sentiment echoed by Members.

- 7.9 DCFO Forshaw thanked those present for their kind words and stated that it had been an honour and a privilege to be Deputy Chief Fire Officer at North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service), and that he hoped that the good work would continue into the future.

## **8 CHAIR'S REPORT**

- 8.1 It was noted that a written paper had been provided to Members to inform them on the meetings and events attended by the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority in their official capacities between July and September 2024.

### **8.2 RESOLVED to:**

- i) Note the information provided within the paper.**

## **9 NEW TRAINING CENTRE BUSINESS CASE**

- 9.1 ACFO Justin Evans presented to Members a business case for the development of a new training centre (the Centre) for the Service. The business case included a comprehensive review of existing facilities, outlined existing risk and included a detailed options appraisal, with a recommendation to progress a preferred option.
- 9.2 The Chair took this opportunity to remind Members that the current facilities available for training at the Service were not fit for purpose, and that upgraded provisions would need to be secured in order to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of its firefighters.
- 9.3 One Member noted the importance of making the right decision and asked what had been discussed so far with regards to partnership working, whether the facility would be able to deal with the necessary retraining of staff as touched upon within the CFO's update, and how the financing of the centre would be scrutinised in the future.
- 9.4 ACFO Evans confirmed that the retraining requirements of operational staff had been built into the business plan for the Centre, and noted that there would still be opportunities to alter the design of the Centre to meet the needs of the Service. It was hoped that the Centre would be considered a centre of excellence with regards to partnership working and whilst talks had not yet taken place, these were in the pipeline.
- 9.5 It was asked if there was a possibility of using the land in the short-term in order to offer training to staff, and ACFO Evans confirmed that there was not at the current time, in the main due to the additional expense that would be incurred in delivering this.

- 9.6 A Member queried whether there would be financial assistance available centrally in order to help fund the development of the Centre, and the Chair responded that at the last Social Partnership meeting he had put this issue to the Minister and that it was being considered. However, there was no guarantee.
- 9.7 A Member stated that the business case for the Centre demonstrated that it was an absolute necessity, and that early engagement in establishing whether any adjustments would be required in order to maximise partnership working and secure a revenue stream in this area was vital. Concern was also expressed about asking the Local Authorities for additional funds in order to pay for the Centre.
- 9.8 ACFO Evans confirmed that a small area of the land remained undeveloped within the plans and that this could be utilised in order to accommodate the needs of partners, if required.
- 9.9 A Member queried whether the Service felt that the net zero target of 2030 would be met, or whether retro fitting equipment to stations may be necessary. ACFO Evans confirmed that the impacts upon the environment were considered in every decision that was made and that all efforts were being made to meet the 2030 target.
- 9.10 One Member highlighted that the existing training centre in Dolgellau was no longer fit for purpose and that it was important to secure the best facilities possible for operational staff who put their lives on the line on a daily basis in order to protect the public. They further noted that the financial situation within Local Authorities was currently extremely challenging, and that the importance of partnership working and the revenue stream that this may generate was paramount. They also felt that pressure should be put upon those within Welsh Government for additional funding.
- 9.11 The Treasurer noted that whilst it was difficult securing funding for capital projects, some success had been experienced in the past and so it remained a possibility. Members felt that the proposal should be built around saving the emergency service sector money in the long-term.
- 9.12 A Member asked if there would be a phased approach to the development of the Centre in order to ensure continuity in the event that the existing training facilities were unavailable for use. The DCFO confirmed that some upgrades had been carried out to the training facilities in Dolgellau and so these should be useable until the new centre was up and running. However, a phased approach may still be adopted in order to safeguard the training provision.



- 9.13 It was asked why the current training facilities had not been developed over the years in order to keep up with need, and whether there were other facilities in the vicinity that could be utilised rather than developing a centre within the Service.
- 9.14 The CFO responded that as the current facilities in Dolgellau were within a National Park there were restrictions on the developments that could be made. The development of a new Centre was a project that should have been started ten years ago and had been continually postponed due to financial restrictions. It was therefore now at a stage where it was necessary and could no longer be deferred.
- 9.15 DCFO Forshaw advised that there were training facilities in Cheshire and Greater Manchester; however, the availability of training slots for other Services to utilise these were extremely limited due to the need for them to train their own staff and were often only available at the weekends which would be untenable for our own training needs.
- 9.16 The CFO informed Members that planning permission to adapt the fire station at Wrexham would be impossible to achieve due to the restrictions that would need to be put in place with regards to the times training would be allowed.
- 9.17 One Member stressed that this decision should be made by Members taking into consideration that they were there to represent the best interests of the Authority, not as representatives of their own local authority.
- 9.18 It was queried whether the proposed changes to the governance of the Authority may impact on the timing of the development of the Centre, and the CFO responded that it would not. She further clarified that there would be a need for at least three training centres across Wales, and that the recommendations of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor were that staff should not have to travel for more than one hour to receive training, which would further restrict the ability to utilise other training centres.
- 9.20 ACFO Evans advised that the biggest challenge with regards to securing planning permission was in relation to the presence of newts; however, remedial actions were being taken in order to mitigate this and the appetite for planning, during conversations with the relevant people, appeared to be favourable.
- 9.21 At this juncture, Cllr Mark Young and Cllr Gareth Sandilands declared an interest due to their membership on the Denbighshire Planning Committee.

## 9.22 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve, in principle, the development of a new centralised training centre (Option 3);**
- ii) commit to maintaining momentum in the development of the proposals, with a focus on affordability and sustainable financing options;**
- iii) authorise the Chief Fire Officer to pursue capital financing options, including self-funding, Welsh Government support, income generation or collaborative opportunities with partners; and**
- iv) delegate authority to the Chief Fire Officer to proceed with the next steps in the project.**

## **10 GOVERNANCE OF FRA BY AUDIT WALES**

- 10.1 Euros Lake from Audit Wales was introduced to Members. He presented the Audit Wales report on the governance of Fire and Rescue Authorities, and explained that as part of the Auditor General's local government studies programme in 2023-24, a review of the governance arrangements across the three Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) in Wales had been conducted.
- 10.2 The salient points from the report were highlighted and the Chair noted that areas of good practice from within the Service had been commented upon; however, there were also areas of scrutiny and challenge that required development.
- 10.3 The Clerk advised that whilst induction and training provision within the Authority were already good, plans had been put in place to develop a framework for assessing Members' training needs, and for the delivery of the same. He also noted that local authorities recognised the need for stability of membership in order to allow Members to build up expertise within the sector.
- 10.4 Another Member felt that it would be important for the Authority to have an input into the new model. The CFO agreed with this statement and advised that a formal request had been made that the Chairs and Chiefs of the Fire Authorities in Wales meet with the Cabinet Secretary outside of the Social Partnership Forum in order to facilitate open discussions on what new arrangements might look like, what it was felt should be retained and what the Minister was minded to add to it. Members were asked to provide their opinions to the Chair outside of the meeting in order that they could be incorporated into this response.

- 10.5 A Member expressed concern that requesting specific skillsets may restrict diversity, and Euros Lake agreed with this comment and confirmed that this had been noted within their report.
- 10.6 There was a general consensus that co-opting Members would be counterproductive and should not be allowed to take place.
- 10.7 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the content of the report.**

The meeting adjourned at 11:10 and recommenced at 11:20

## **11 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2023-24**

- 11.1 Elgan Roberts presented to Members the Statement of Accounts for 2023-24. The report also presented the findings of the Auditor General for Wales which confirmed an unqualified audit opinion.
- 11.2 Carwyn Rees from Audit Wales was welcomed to the meeting and asked for his thanks to the Finance Department for their hard work be noted.
- 11.3 The Chair highlighted the statement within the report that indicated that two Members had not completed and returned their Declaration of Interest forms. He stressed the importance of all Members returning these forms when requested.
- 11.4 The Chair queried the usable reserves of £9.1m and whether this was within the recommended threshold. The Treasurer responded that whilst the level of reserves were relatively high, a significant proportion of these were capital funds which were rolled over. Carwyn Rees provided a link to Members within the meeting to a sustainability tool which Members could use to compare these reserves to other organisations within the same sector.
- 11.5 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the audited outturn position and performance as detailed within the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1);**
- ii) note the report of the Auditor General for Wales which confirms an unqualified audit opinion (Appendix 2);**
- iii) note the proposed letter of representation including the uncorrected mis-statement; and**
- iv) confirm the recommendation of approval of the final audited 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.**

## **12 FINANCIAL UPDATE 2024-257**

12.1 Dafydd Edwards, Authority Treasurer, presented the Financial Update 2024-25 paper which aimed to provide Members with an update on the revenue and capital expenditure forecast for 2024/25, as at 30 September 2024.

12.2 It was asked whether there would be any risk in connection with the Government's plans to raise Employer's National Insurance contributions within the budget. The Treasurer confirmed that there would, but that would be included within next year's budget. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that the potential impact of this raise had been accounted for, and that central government were being lobbied for additional funding.

12.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the projected revenue underspend and the projected capital slippage for the 2024/25 financial year, as detailed within the report; and**
- ii) note the risks associated with inflation, supply chain issues, and the legal challenge, where the nature of figures forecasted in this report are prudent.**

## **13 BUDGET SETTING 2025-26**

13.1 ACFO MacArthur delivered a paper to Members which set out the budget process, planning assumptions and timescales for setting the Authority's revenue budget for 2025/26.

13.2 The Chair thanked the Budget Scrutiny working group for their input into the budget setting process.

13.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the planning assumptions being used to develop the revenue budget for 2025/26;**
- ii) note the remit of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group established by the Audit Committee and the proposed reporting timetable;**
- iii) note the proposal to provide initial budget estimates to the Executive Panel at its meeting of 16 December 2023; and**
- iv) note the proposal to seek approval for the 2025/26 revenue budget by the Authority at its meeting of 20 January 2025.**

## **14 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT 2023-24**

14.1 AM Anthony Jones presented for Members' approval the annual assessment of the Authority's performance in achieving its Improvement and Well-Being Objectives, and medium-term Equality Objectives during 2023/24.

14.2 The Chair thanked Officers for the work that had gone into producing this report, which had previously been scrutinised and endorsed by the Executive Panel.

14.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the contents of the Annual Performance Assessment for the period 2023/24; and**
- ii) approve the Annual Performance Assessment 2023/24 for publication on the Fire and Rescue Authority's website.**

## **15 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023-24**

15.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented to the Authority the Annual Governance Statement, as required by The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014. It was confirmed that a draft had been submitted to Audit Wales prior to 31 May 2024, as required by the aforementioned legislation.

15.2 The Chair noted that there was a statutory requirement to produce the Annual Governance Statement, and that it had already been signed off by Audit Wales.

15.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the governance arrangements outlined within the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement;**
- ii) note the forward work plan for 2024/25; and**
- iii) approve the 2023/24 Annual Government Statement for publication on the Authority's website by 31 October 2024.**

## **16 WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARD 2023-24**

16.1 Natalie Jones, Welsh Language Officer, presented for Members' approval the Welsh Language Standards Annual Monitoring Report for 2023/24 in relation to compliance with Welsh Language Standards 155,161,167, that detail the Authority must produce a monitoring report each financial year.

16.2 Members asked for their congratulations be passed on to the Department for the hard work that they carry out in this important area, and for the commitment of the Service to the Welsh language.

16.3 One Member queried how the training programme was monitored to ensure that members of staff develop their standard of Welsh to the required level. The Welsh Language Officer confirmed that opportunities for them to develop their language skills were regularly provided and records were kept and reviewed annually.

16.4 DCFO Forshaw further advised that a great deal of work was carried out in order to promote the Welsh language within the Service, and that this was fed back to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee as part of the monitoring process. ACFO MacArthur also asked Members to note that the Welsh language requirements were part of the probationary process for all new staff members.

16.5 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the Welsh Language Standards Annual Monitoring Report for 2023/34 for publication on the Authority's website; and**
- ii) note the Service's intention to publicise the document as noted in Standards 155,161,167.**

## **17 DRAFT COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 25/26**

17.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented the draft Community Risk Management Implementation Plan for 2025-26 to Members, and advised Members that the Service sought to seek approval to consult with the public on the proposed improvement and well-being objectives.

17.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the content of the report; and**
- ii) approve the draft Community Risk Management Implementation Plan 2025/26 for consultation with Authority Members, staff, relevant trade unions, stakeholders and the public prior to approval at the meeting of the Authority in March 2025.**

## **18 HEATING DECARBONISATION PLAN**

18.1 ACFO Justin Evans delivered the Heating Decarbonisation Plan, which provided detailed measures and timescales to mitigate the carbon emissions arising from the heating of the estate for the period up to 2030.

18.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the Heating Decarbonisation Plan.**

## **19 COMPLAINTS, PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURES AND EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION**

19.1 ACFO Helen MacArthur provided Members with an update on external complaints and expressions of appreciation received by the Service between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

19.2 The Chair noted that members of the public were highly likely to express their appreciation of the Service via social media and that these were not reflected within the figures.

19.3 **RESOLVED to:**

**i) note the contents of the report.**

## **20 URGENT MATTERS**

20.1 There were no urgent matters to consider.

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 20 January 2025.

**Meeting closed: 11:43**

Report to	<b>North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority</b>
Date	<b>20 January 2025</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Not applicable</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Members Services</b> ( <a href="mailto:members.services@northwalesfire.gov.wales">members.services@northwalesfire.gov.wales</a> )
Subject	<b>Chair's Report</b>



## PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 This quarterly report provides Members with information on the meetings and events attended by the Chair and Deputy Chair of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) in their official capacities between October and December 2024.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The Chair and/or Deputy Chair have attended several meetings and events, both internally and externally on behalf of the Authority.

## RECOMMENDATION

- 3 **It is recommended that Members:**
  - i) **note the information provided.**

## OBSERVATIONS FROM EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 4 This report has not previously been considered.

## INFORMATION

- 5 In addition to the Authority-related meetings, the Chair and Deputy Chair have met with the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) on a regular basis.
- 6 On 3 October the Chair and the Deputy Chair attended the Awards Ceremony for NWFRS staff held at Venue Cymru.
- 7 On 7 October the Chair and the CFO attended a meeting of the Social Partnership Forum which was held remotely.
- 8 On 11 October the Deputy Chair attended a Ceremony of Achievement at Mold Fire Station for those youngsters from Castell Alun School who had successfully completed the Phoenix course.



- 9 On 18 October the Deputy Chair attended a Ceremony of Achievement at Mold Fire Station for those youngsters from Argoed High School who had successfully completed the Phoenix course.
- 10 On 30 October the Chair attended a virtual meeting with Audit Wales as part of their review into the setting of wellbeing objectives.
- 11 On 13 November the Chair visited the crew at Llangefni Fire Station who were holding a recruitment event.
- 12 On 15 November the Chair attended a Ceremony of Achievement at Menai Bridge Fire Station for those youngsters from Ysgol David Hughes who had successfully completed the Phoenix Course.
- 13 On 21 November the Deputy Chair attended the funeral of former Authority member Councillor Veronica Gay.
- 14 On 22 November the Chair attended a Ceremony of Achievement at Menai Bridge Fire Station for those youngsters from Ysgol Brynrefail who had successfully completed the Phoenix course.
- 15 On 25 November the Chair attended in person a meeting of the Social Partnership Forum held at the Welsh Government Offices (the CFO also attended virtually).
- 16 On 29 November the Chair and the CFO attended a virtual meeting of the North Wales Regional Partnership Board.
- 17 On 4 December the Chair attended a virtual meeting with Jayne Bryant, Cabinet Secretary for Local Government, together with the Chair of Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority plus the three CFOs for the Welsh Fire and Rescue Services.
- 18 On 6 December, the Deputy Chair attended a Ceremony of Achievement at Abergele Fire Station for those youngsters from Ysgol Emrys Ap Iwan who had successfully completed the Phoenix course.
- 19 On 9 December the Chair and the Deputy Chair attended the Emergency Services Carol Service held at St Asaph Cathedral.
- 20 On 11 December the Chair and the Deputy Chair attended at North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) Headquarters and met with senior officers to examine the Strategic Risk Register.

- 21 On 25 December the Chair visited the watches on duty at Caernarfon and Holyhead Fire Stations whilst the Deputy Chair visited the watch at Deeside Fire Station.

## IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	Not relevant.
Budget	Any costs associated with meetings and events attended by members are reimbursed from the travel and subsistence budget.
Legal	No specific implications arise from approving the recommendation.
Staffing	No specific implications arise from approving the recommendation.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	No specific implications arise from approving the recommendation.
Risks	No specific risks arise from approving the recommendation.

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



## 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.

Report to	<b>North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority</b>
Date	<b>20 January 2025</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Helen MacArthur Assistant Chief Fire Officer</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Elgan Roberts, Head of Finance and Procurement</b>
Subject	<b>Provisional Outturn 2024-25</b>



## PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide Members with an update on the revenue and capital expenditure forecast for 2024/25, as at 31 December 2024.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The net budget requirement was approved by the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) at its meeting on 22 January 2024. This confirmed a net requirement of £48.322m to be funded by the constituent local authorities. In order to cap the budget requirement at £48.322m, the Authority approved some non-recurring measures, including the use of reserves.
- 3 In the current year, funding of £0.227 million has been received from the local authorities as a SCAPE Grant top-up, due to partial funding via the levy included in the budget setting process for 2024/25. Additionally, a grant of £0.208 million has been received from the Welsh Government to support pay pressures during 2024/25.
- 4 The actual expenditure is now forecast to be £47.803m, which includes costs relating to various projects, national pay settlements and movement to reserves.
- 5 The Authority approved the 2024/25 capital budget of £5.676m, on 22 January 2024. In addition, there is rollover funding of £1.110m from prior years. The capital programme is experiencing slippage on schemes and it is anticipated that expenditure will be £4.403m and a requirement to rollover funding of £1.379m.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6 Members are asked to:
- i) **note the projected revenue outturn position and the projected capital slippage for the 2024/25 financial year, as detailed within the report;**
  - ii) **note the risks associated with the provisional outturn and recognise that the figures forecasted in this report are prudent; and**
  - iii) **note the proposed movement to reserves of £0.070m for slippage on non-pay expenditure relating to operating equipment.**

## OBSERVATIONS FROM EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 7 This report has not previously been considered by members.

## BACKGROUND

- 8 Each year the Authority is required to set a balanced revenue budget which must be approved by the full Authority. The final budget for 2024/25 was approved by the Authority at its meeting of the 22 January 2024. This confirmed a net revenue budget requirement of £48.322m to be funded by the constituent local authorities.
- 9 When setting the budget, Members also approved a range of non-recurring measures necessary to achieve financial balance within 2024/25 which included utilising reserves.
- 10 The capital plan of £5.676m was presented to the Members Budget Scrutiny working group and approved by the Authority at its meeting of the 22 January 2024. The Capital Strategy for the period April 2024 to March 2034 was approved at Audit Committee in in March 2024 and ratified by the Authority at its meeting of the 15 April 2024.
- 11 This budget monitoring report provides information on the draft revenue and capital expenditure outturn position for the 2024/25 financial year.

## INFORMATION

### REVENUE BUDGET

- 12 **Pay:** Employee costs represent over 70% of gross expenditure and the 2024/25 staffing budget is £35.430m, including measures taken when setting the budget to contain expenditure within the figure approved. However, it was also noted at that time that the national pay negotiations for all staff were still ongoing.



- 13 The budget setting process included an assumption that pay awards for 2024/25 would be 4% for all staff. The outcome of the April 2024 pay award for local government staff was an increase £1,290 on NJC pay point 2 to 43 inclusive, and 2.5% on all pay points above 43.
- 14 The firefighters' pay award was settled in May 2024 and confirmed that 4% had been accepted for from 1 July 2024 onwards. Detailed changes to the RDS retainer fee structure are to be implemented from 1 January 2025.
- 15 **Non-pay:** The non-pay forecasts account for known costs and any reductions in expenditure. However, uncertainty persists due to the general economic outlook and supply chain challenges.
- 16 **Income:** Whilst the majority of expenditure is funded from the constituent authority levy, income is received from the Welsh Government for grant funded activities, as well as recharges from other bodies in relation to the use of our premises. In addition, the Authority has benefitted from additional income from secondments and a one-off grant from the Welsh Government to support pay inflation for 2024/25 and education around the 20 mile per hour speed restrictions in Wales.
- 17 **Revenue cost of capital:** Capital financing costs include the costs of borrowing and revenue charges for using capital assets. It is anticipated that this budget will be underspent due to the delays in completing capital projects.

## **REVENUE OUTTURN FORECAST FOR 2024/25**

- 18 At this stage within the financial year there remains a number of uncertainties and risks that may impact on the financial performance of the Authority. It is anticipated that the outturn may range from break-even through to an underspend of £1m before transfers to earmarked reserves. However, based on year to date expenditure, the most likely full year revenue forecast as at 31 December 2024 is set out below and indicates an underspend of £0.519m.

	<b>Budget (£m)</b>	<b>Forecast (£m)</b>	<b>Variance (£m)</b>	<b>Variance (%)</b>
Employees	35.430	34.287	(1.142)	-3.22%
Premises	3.530	3.347	(0.183)	-5.19%
Transport	1.259	1.336	0.078	6.16%
Supplies	6.622	6.910	0.288	4.35%
Third Party Payments	0.363	0.399	0.036	10.02%
Capital Finance & Charges	2.989	2.989	0.000	0.00%
Income	(0.946)	(1.535)	(0.589)	62.26%
Use of Reserves	(0.924)	0.070	0.994	-107.58%
<b>Forecast Outturn</b>	<b>48.322</b>	<b>47.803</b>	<b>(0.519)</b>	<b>-1.07%</b>

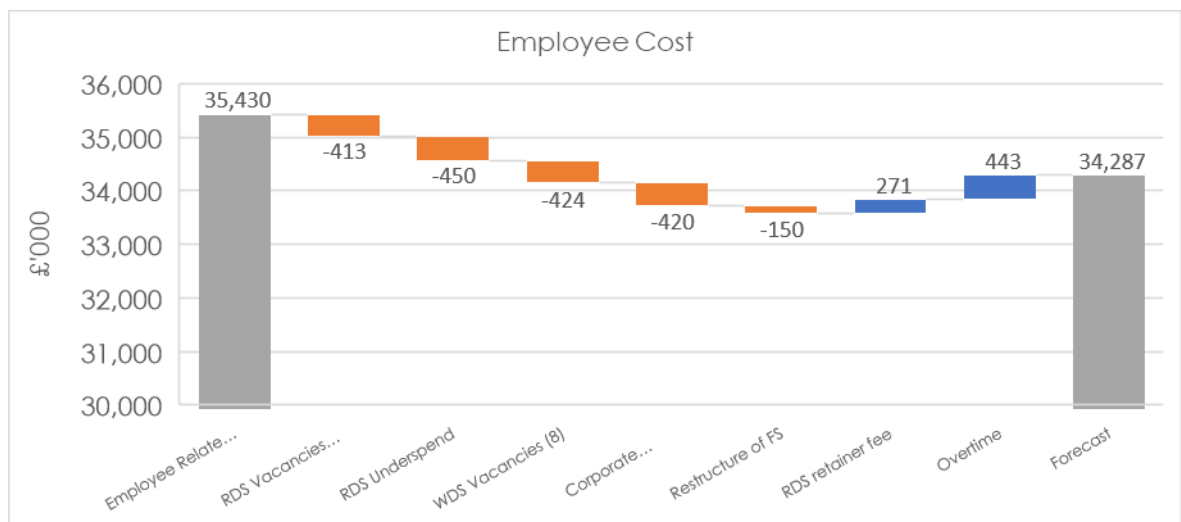
- 19 There is uncertainty regarding Firelink costs, due to an ongoing national legal challenge. If the legal challenge is found in favour of the sector, the in-year costs will reduce by £0.500m. As it is not clear whether this matter will be settled before the year-end, an earmarked reserve will be established. Should the matter settle in favour of the sector the reserve will be utilised to support the implementation costs associated with the replacement Emergency Service Network.

## EMPLOYEE COSTS

- 20 Employee costs form a significant element of the budget (over 70% of gross costs) and include pay, pension costs, cost of recruitment and training, and employee services, such as occupational health services.
- 21 Action continues to be taken to increase the number of retained duty (RDS) firefighters to address and maintain availability issues. At the time of budget setting for 2024/25 there were 474 RDS personnel and a further provision was made to increase the RDS capacity by an additional 30 at a cost of £0.413m. This reflected the improvements made in recent years to increase the retained capacity and provide much needed cover. However, as can be seen from the table below this has remained a significant challenge with actual numbers dipping below the original budget in the early stages of the financial year. During September 2024, following successful recruitment, it is pleasing to note that the numbers have increased, although a significant full budget underspend is being experienced.

<b>RDS analysis</b>	<b>Budget 2024/25</b>	<b>Apr-24</b>	<b>Jul-24</b>	<b>Sep-24</b>	<b>Dec-24</b>
Headcount	474	459	465	487	492
100% equivalent	378	365	367	385	386

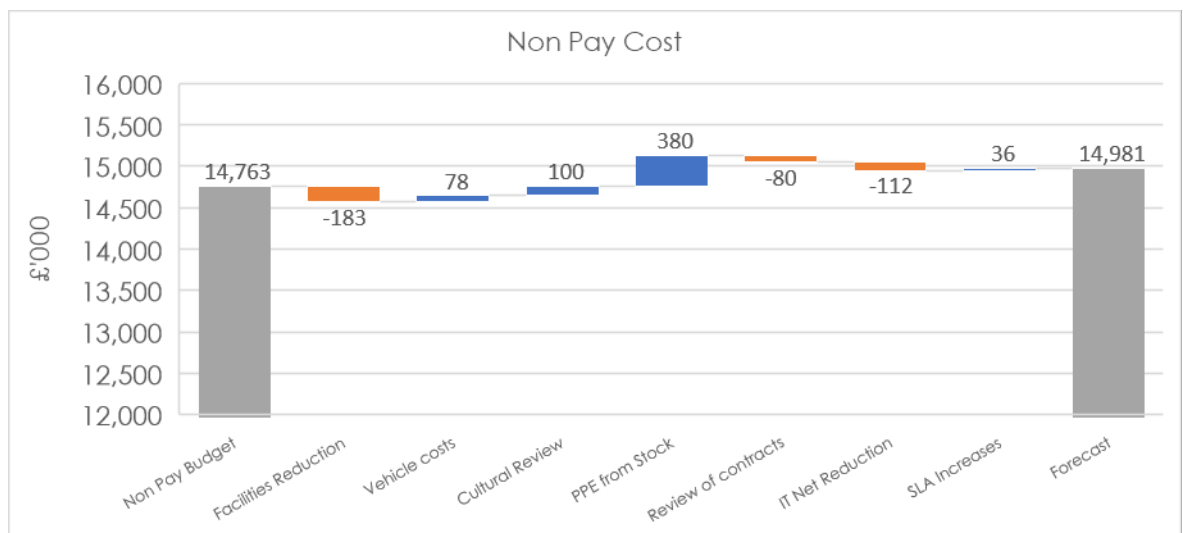
- 22 The budget underspend in the RDS staff budget reflects the recruitment and retention difficulties and variances in the variable pay, including drill fees, training allowances and activity.
- 23 Within the staff group relating to wholetime operational staff, there have been a higher than expected number of retirements, leading to vacancies within the operational workforce. Recruitment measures have been taken to address this shortfall, although an underspend is anticipated. However, due to the need to maintain operational capacity and deliver training it has been necessary to utilise overtime.
- 24 The difficulty in recruiting to specialised posts within the corporate departments has continued during 2024/25 with a full year underspend anticipated.
- 25 The planned review and restructuring of the fire safety department has been deferred into 2025/26 to allow for capacity within the operational crews to be assessed.
- 26 The overall forecast expenditure for employee cost is £34.287m, which is an underspend of £1.142m, with key movements analysed below:



## NON-PAY COSTS

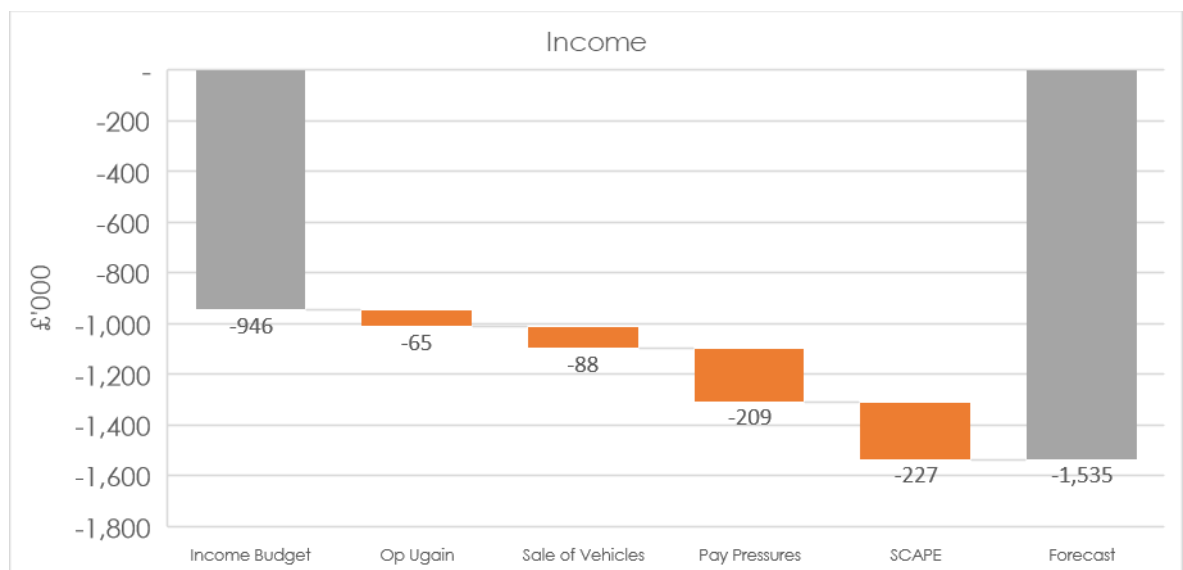
- 27 The non-pay budget which covers Premises, Transport Supplies, Third Party Payments, and Capital Finance & Charges, is forecast to be Overspent by £0.218m.

- 28 Non-pay expenditure is subject to ongoing review by budget holders to ensure that the projections continue to be reasonable and to manage unavoidable costs. The forecast includes additional costs for vehicle expenses (£0.078m), PPE from stock (£0.380m), and SLA increases (£0.036m), while savings from the review of contracts amount to £0.080m.
- 29 The largest reduction in non-pay is seen within facilities, where costs have decreased by £0.183m. This is due to the Authority benefiting from favourable market conditions and successful appeals against rateable values for national non-domestic rates.
- 30 Non-pay costs have been reduced by £70k due to slippage on the Holmatro hydraulics replacement which is unlikely to be completed by the year end, the funding been moved to reserves to fund the expenditure in 2025/26.
- 31 The forecast includes one-off savings as planned works associated with the marine fleet have been deferred into next year. The reductions within the ICT forecast, including savings of £0.112m arising from contract renewals, have enabled costs of c£0.100m costs arising from the external cultural review to be met from existing financial resources.
- 32 The forecast cost for capital finance is currently aligned to the budget. However, there is some slippage within the capital scheme that will affect the outturn position. Ongoing scrutiny of the capital programme is in place, to ensure that schemes are completed within the required timeframes.



## INCOME

- 33 In addition to the constituent authority levy, the budget also encompasses anticipated income from fees, charges, and grants, primarily related to the recharges for shared buildings with other entities and service level agreements with various organisations.
- 34 The Authority has received income from the Welsh Government to support the provision of education to drivers exceeding the recently introduced 20mph speed limits and grant funding to support with pay pressure for 2024/25. Additional income has also been recognised following the sale of vehicles and the remaining balance of £0.227 for SCAPE passed through from Local Authorities.
- 35 Income is exceeding the budget by £0.362m, as detailed below.



## CAPITAL PROGRAMME

- 36 The Authority approved a capital programme of £5.676m in January 2024, of which £1.1m is rollover funding from the 2023/24 financial year.
- 37 Due to ongoing delays, capital expenditure to date has totalled £1.138m, with the year-end projection forecasted to be £4.403m.
- 38 Given the capital slippage, a request for rollover funding amounting to £1.379m is forecast. Further details are provided below:

<b>Project Name/Description</b>	<b>Budget £'000</b>	<b>Actual £'000</b>	<b>Forecast £'000</b>	<b>Rollover £'000</b>
ICT Server and mobilising Equipment upgrades	827		227	591
Training towers	305	36	314	
Station improvements	1,100	467	672	428
Sustainability works	469		470	
Training Facilities upgrade	300			300
Fire Appliances	426	229	533	
Light Vehicles	166	194	165	
Specialist Light Vehicles	632	201	572	60
Operational Equipment	290		290	
Fleet Equipment	50		50	
<b>Rollover of Funding from 2023/24</b>				
Fire Appliances	960		960	
Sustainability works	150	12	150	
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,676</b>	<b>1,138</b>	<b>4,403</b>	<b>1,379</b>

39 The anticipated financing of the capital expenditure is set out below:

<b>Funding</b>	<b>Amount £m</b>
Borrowing	3.676
Earmarked Reserves	0.727
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.403</b>

## IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	This report links to NWFRA's long-term well-being objectives. Funding for the Service benefits the communities of North Wales and ensures there is sufficient investment in infrastructure to enable the service to provide emergency responses and prevention work well in to the future.
Budget	Budget is set annually in accordance with the proposed service delivery which includes emergency response and prevention work.
Legal	It is a legal requirement that the Authority produces the Statement of Accounts in accordance with the prescribed standards.
Staffing	Effective financial management supports the long term workforce strategy to ensure that the Authority is able to discharge its responsibilities
Equalities/Human Rights/Welsh Language	None
Risks	Income and expenditure is closely monitored to ensure that deviations from the approved budget are properly identified and reported to Members.

Report to	<b>North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority</b>
Date	<b>20 January 2025</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Policy &amp; Planning</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Anthony Jones, Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation</b>
Subject	<b>Emergency Cover Review (ECR)</b>



## PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) with an update on the work of the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Task and Finish Group, established in response to the decision made by the Authority at its meeting on 18 December 2023. The purpose of this group was to research and develop a new permanent option to improve the provision of emergency cover across North Wales.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The ECR Task and Finish Group was chaired by a Watch Manager from Deeside Fire Station, with the Deputy Chair a Watch Manager from Rhyl Fire Station. The Group comprised of 16 colleagues working at various levels, stations and departments throughout North Wales fire and Rescue Service (the Service), including representatives of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU). They met on 12 occasions between February and November 2024, during which time they discussed and researched several emergency response models.
- 3 At the Authority meeting on 15 July 2024, Members were presented with a progress report and they agreed for the ECR Task and Finish Group to further research models two and three, or variations of them.
- 4 By 10 November 2024, the FBU representatives concluded that model 2 would not work and verbally withdrew from the Task and Finish Group on 11 November 2024.
- 5 On 17 December 2024, the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer met with the workstream leads and the FBU Chair to confirm this position and to thank all those involved for their hard work and diligence.



## RECOMMENDATION

- 6 That Members:
- i) Note that officers continued to work with staff and representative bodies in social partnership to develop the ECR Task and Finish Group research models two, three or variations of them.
  - ii) Note the agreed conclusion that the five-watch duty system will not work in North Wales and as a result the withdrawal of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and closure of the task and finish group.
  - iii) Appreciate the efforts and contribution made by the ECR Task and Finish Group Members.
  - iv) Ask officers to continue to devise and test alternative solutions with the representative bodies, within the agreed budget, to address emergency cover in rural locations.

## BACKGROUND

7 During the period of July to September 2023 the Authority consulted the public on three possible options for the future delivery of its emergency response to the communities of North Wales.

8 Following the 12-week public consultation, the Fire Authority met on 18 December 2023 and concluded:

*Members request that Officers continue to work with all stakeholders to develop a new permanent option taking into consideration today's decision and the limits of the proposed budget.*

9 Therefore, expressions of interest were sought from staff working at all levels across all stations, duty systems and departments and an ECR Task and Finish Group was established in January 2024. The FBU have also been represented and present at every meeting.

10 At the Authority meeting on 15 July 2024, Members were presented with a progress report and they agreed for the ECR Task and Finish Group to further research models two and three, or variations of them.

## INFORMATION

11 The ECR Task and Finish Group held its first meeting on 1 February 2024 and have since met on 12 occasions, discussing the current response model in depth and examining innovative means of providing a future, more equitable emergency response model.

- 12 The ECR Task and Finish Group has been supported by Service departments as required, had access to emergency response data and modelling and also received presentations on alternative emergency cover delivery models from other UK Fire and Rescue Services.
- 13 Following the Authority meeting and the direction of Members, the ECR Task and Finish Group continued to work on model 2 and model 3.
- **Model 2:** Duty system changes are introduced on all fulltime stations to release staff. Utilising staff released by this change, the WDSR firefighters and 78% of the Service's crewing resilience, provides three new day staffed stations.
  - **Model 3:** Aligns the minimum ridership of eight fulltime appliances with the minimum ridership of the on-call Retained Duty System (RDS), WDSR firefighters and Wrexham's second fulltime appliance i.e. appliances crewed with four firefighters. Utilises staff released by this change, the WDSR firefighters and 11% of the Service's crewing resilience to provide three new day staffed stations.
- 14 By 10 November 2024, the FBU representatives concluded that model 2 would not work and verbally withdrew from the Task and Finish Group on 11 November 2024. They then sent the following e-mail by means of explanation:

*"Following lengthy discussions with members regarding the five-watch system, it has become clear that this option is not viable for North Wales.*

*It has come to light over the weekend through communication with members and Control staff in Scotland, that they also struggle to implement this duty shift system properly, with a far larger pool of staff.*

*This would ultimately lead to this duty shift system being a costly option, without offering an improvement to availability and therefore not within the perimeters set out by the fire authority.*


*As the only other option left is to drop crewing levels, we feel morally obliged to maintain our stance on this and not engage with any work in order to present this to the fire authority.*

*This has been put to members and they are also in agreement that it is best to withdraw from the working group."*

- 15 On 17 December 2024 the Chief Fire Officer and Deputy Chief Fire Officer met with the workstream leads and the FBU Chair to confirm this position and to thank all those involved for their hard work and diligence.

## IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The ECR outcomes must meet the Authority's obligations under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.
Budget	Any solution must be within the approved budget.
Legal	None.
Staffing	The Service has conducted extensive direct consultation with staff and their representative bodies and will continue to do so.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer engaged with ED&I groups throughout the consultation.
Risks	The ECR and the work of the Task and Finish Group seeks to reduce the risks of not being able to respond to emergencies effectively and efficiently in the communities of North Wales.

Report to	<b>North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	
Date	<b>20 January 2025</b>	
Lead Officer	<b>Helen MacArthur, Assistant Chief Fire Officer</b>	
Contact Officer	<b>Elgan Roberts, Head of Finance and Procurement</b>	
Subject	<b>Budget Setting 2025-26</b>	

### **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an update on the current financial planning assessment to set a balanced budget for 2025/26, and to seek endorsement to confirm the indicative levy with constituent local authorities.

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 2 North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) is required to provide indicative figures for the 2025/26 financial levy to constituent local authorities by 31 December 2024, and confirm the final figures by 15 February 2025. To achieve this, the Authority will consider the revenue and capital budget for 2025/26 at its meeting on 20 January 2025. The budget planning process has been subject to scrutiny by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and the current planning assessment of £52.389m has been confirmed.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 3 It is recommended that Members:
  - i) Note the findings of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, including the planning assumptions being used to develop the revenue budget for 2025/26;
  - ii) note the current financial planning assessment of a budget requirement of £52.389m for 2025/26;
  - iii) note the proposal to utilise £0.601m of reserves for 2025/26; and
  - iv) endorse the communication of the draft financial levy of £51.788m from the constituent local authorities.

### **OBSERVATIONS FROM EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE**

- 4 This report was considered by Members at Executive Panel and Audit Committee on the 16 December 2024 when they endorsed the report, subject to a minor amendment to appendix 3 to show the real terms year on year increase.

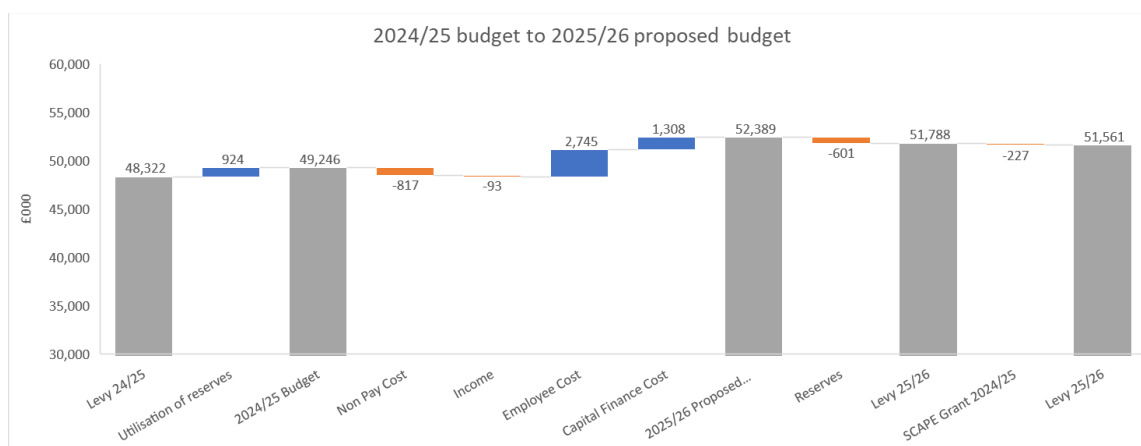
## BACKGROUND

- 5 Each year the Authority is required to set a balanced revenue budget which must be approved by the full Authority. The indicative financial levy must be communicated to constituent local authorities by the 31 December each year and the final levy confirmed by the 15 of February before the commencement of the financial year. To achieve these timescales, the 2025/26 proposed revenue and capital budgets will be presented to the Authority at its meeting on 20 January 2025.
- 6 The Chartered Institute of Public Finance (CIPFA) requires that organisations have financial plans which demonstrate how expenditure will be funded over the short and medium term. The Authority's financial sustainability is, therefore, underpinned by knowledge and understanding of the key cost drivers and evaluation of risks and uncertainties.
- 7 Following the ECR consultation conducted during 2023/24 and in line with the Authority's decision in December 2023, the budget proposals are based on maintaining the existing service delivery model. The work around proposals to improve rural availability is ongoing and outside of the scope of this budget setting paper.
- 8 The process has been overseen by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group (the Group) which was established to provide scrutiny of the budget setting process, including all areas of income and expenditure. With membership from each local authority, the Group has met on 5 occasions between June and November 2024, with a further meeting scheduled for the 12 December.

## INFORMATION

- 9 The Group was established by the Authority with representation from each constituent local authority. It has convened on five occasions to review all aspects of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service's (the Service) expenditure. These meetings focused on key areas, including direct pay costs, non-pay expenditure, capital financing, interest, and lease arrangements.
- 10 Detailed budget planning has been conducted in line with the key planning assumptions, risks, and uncertainties outlined in [Appendix 1](#).
- 11 The initial planning assessment indicated that a budget increase exceeding 10% would be required for the 2025/26 financial year. This included a new cost pressure of £1.009m arising from the nationally agreed increase to the retaining fee for RDS personnel. This was made prior to the Autumn Statement and, therefore, did not account for potential changes to employers' national insurance contributions, which were unknown at the time.

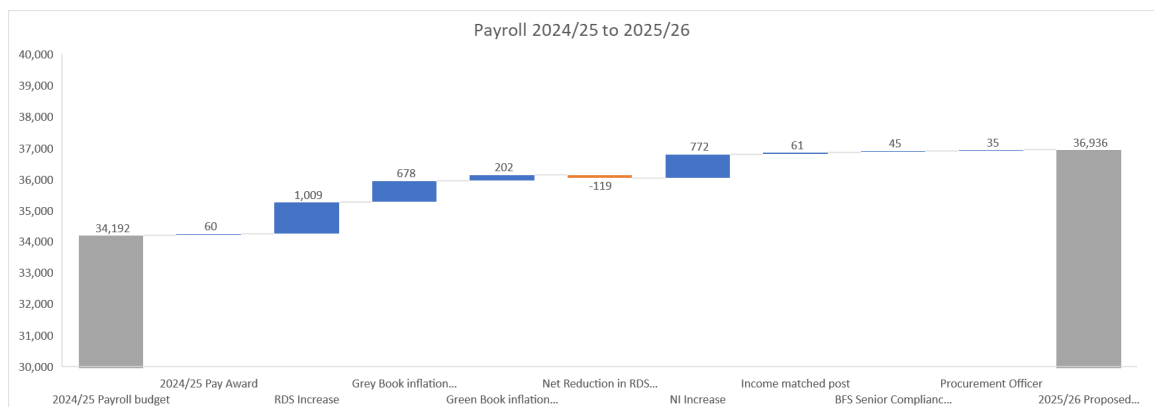
- 12 The initial detailed budget planning identified additional unavoidable pressures, which have since been addressed through the efforts of the Group. The final draft assessment establishes a budget requirement of £52.389m. After utilising £0.601m from reserves, the levy requirement for 2025/26 is £51.788m, representing a 7% gross increase in the local authority levy. This increase does not reflect any support from the government in respect of increased national insurance costs.



- 13 The levy requirement of £51.78m for 2025/26 incorporates the financial impact of changes to employers' National Insurance contributions, amounting to £0.772m. Furthermore, the £48.322m levied for 2024/25 exclude the SCAPE pension grant, and requires adjustment to make a like for like year on year comparison.
- 14 A draft breakdown of the levy requirement of £51.788m by each constituent local authority is set out within [Appendix 2](#).
- 15 The table below confirms reductions of £0.902m for employee and non-pay cost identified through the work of the Group between September and October 2024. However, the net reduction was £0.386m due to the impact of the increase to National Insurance rates following the Autumn budget statement and refinement of capital financing.

£'m	2024/25	Sept-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Changes via Budget Scrutiny
<b>Employees</b>	34.192	36.751	36.614	36.936	0.185
<b>Non-Pay</b>	12.807	13.077	12.432	11.990	-1.087
<b>Income</b>	-0.946	-1.039	-1.039	-1.039	0.000
<b>Capital Finance</b>	3.193	3.985	3.856	4.407	0.516
<b>Total</b>	<b>49.246</b>	<b>52.774</b>	<b>51.863</b>	<b>52.388</b>	<b>-0.386</b>

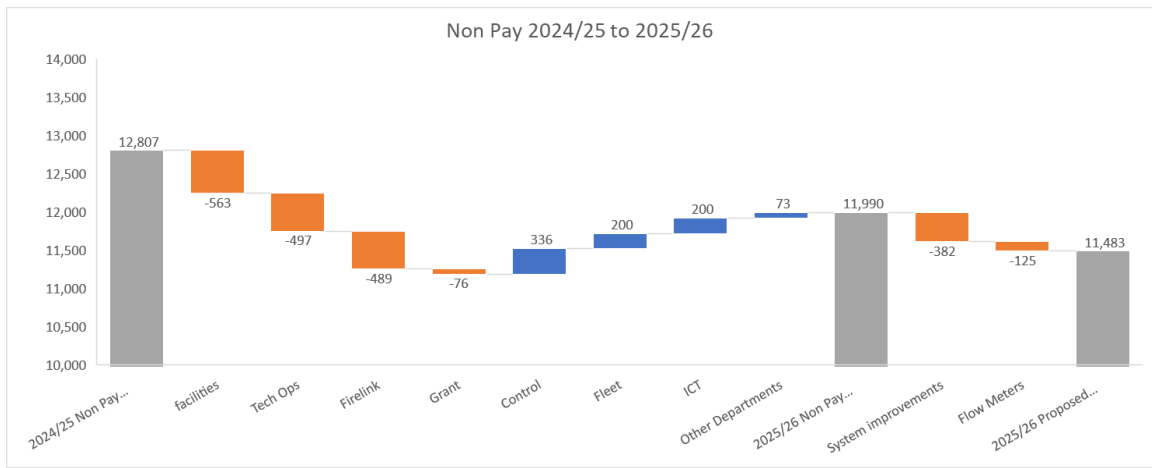
- 16 The following waterfall charts illustrate the key changes between the 2024/25 budget and the proposed 2025/26 budget, highlighting the adjustments and the utilisation of reserves where applicable and appropriate.
- 17 Employee costs have risen from the 2024/25 payroll budget of £34.192m to the proposed 2025/26 payroll budget of £36.936m. Key contributors to this increase include £0.060m for the 2024/25 pay award for Green Book staff, £1.009m for the Retained Duty System (RDS) effective from the 1 January 2025, £0.648m for Grey Book inflation at 3%, £0.202m for Green Book inflation at 3%, and £0.772m reflecting the impact of changes to employers' National Insurance contributions. These increases are partially offset by a reduction of £0.119m due to adjustments in RDS positions (reducing the assumed additional recruitment from 30 to 15). Additionally, £0.061m is allocated to cover an income matched post, £0.045m allocated for the introduction of a Business Fire Safety (BFS) Senior Compliance Officer post, and £0.035m for a Procurement Officer role.



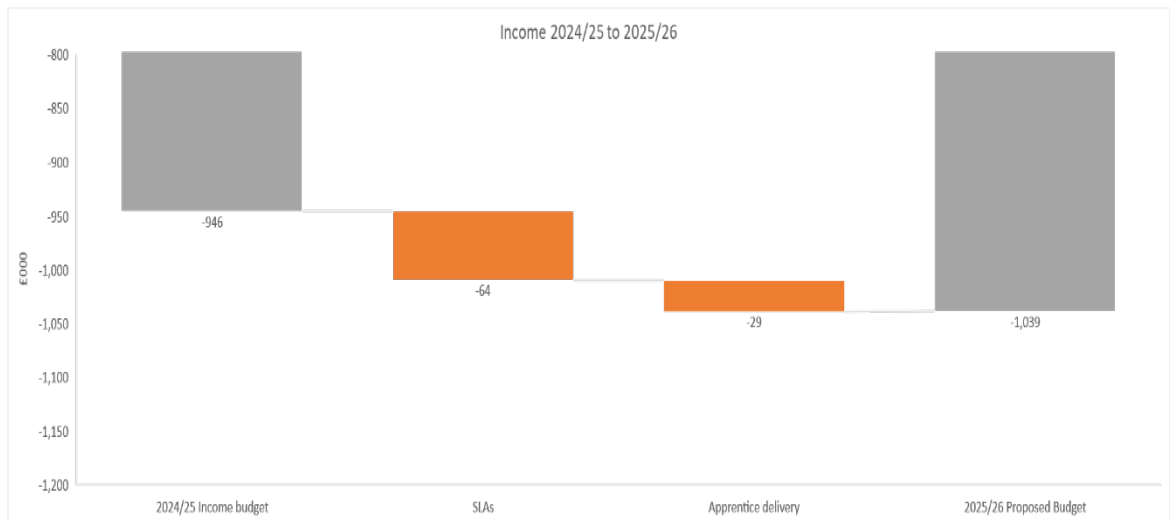
- 18 The analysis of direct payroll costs, detailed below, confirms a total allocation of £36.936m for employees in service delivery roles. The budget planning includes provisions to support the continued growth of the Retained Duty System (RDS), albeit with a reduced additional recruitment assumption of 15, ensuring operational response capacity and resilience are maintained.

Analysis of Direct Pay Costs	2025/26 £'m
Delivery of Response Services	31.267
Delivery of Protection and Prevention Services	2.712
Corporate Services	2.957
<b>Staffing Budget Requirement</b>	<b>36.936</b>

- 19 Non-pay costs are projected to decrease from £12.807m in 2024/25 to a revised baseline of £11.990m for 2025/26. This reduction is driven by £0.563m in utility savings, £0.497m from the removal of one-off Tech Ops expenditures, £0.489m from anticipated Firelink cost reductions, and £0.076m due to the cessation of grant-funded expenditure.
- 20 These reductions are partially offset by increases of £0.336m for Control, £0.200m each for Fleet and ICT, and £0.055m for other departmental costs. One-off costs, including £0.382m for system improvements and £0.125m for flow meters, are proposed to be funded from reserves, resulting in a final proposed non-pay budget of £11.955m.

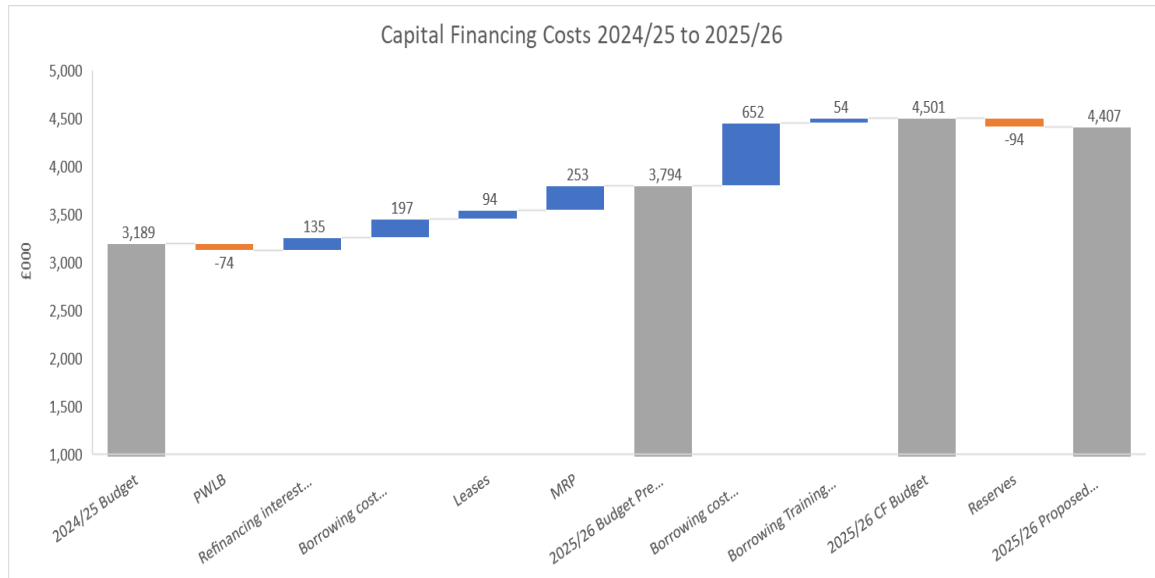


- 21 Income is projected to increase from the 2024/25 budget of £0.946m to £1.039m, driven by higher revenue from Service Level Agreements (SLAs) and additional income anticipated from apprentice delivery in partnership with Coleg Cambria.





- 22 Capital financing costs are projected to increase from £3.189m in 2024/25 to £4.407m in 2025/26, primarily due to rising interest rates. Key drivers include £0.135m in refinancing interest costs, £0.197m for borrowing related to capital projects, £0.094m for leases, and £0.253m for the Minimum Revenue Provision. Additional borrowing costs for new capital projects and training facilities contribute £0.652m and £0.054m, respectively. These increases are partially offset by a £0.074m reduction in Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) costs and £0.094m utilisation of reserves, resulting in the proposed budget of £4.407m.



## FURTHER WORK

- 23 Business cases for capital funding will undergo further internal scrutiny to ensure they align with the organisation's strategic objectives, effectively mitigate risks, and comply with the principles of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015. This process will provide assurance that proposed investments contribute to long-term sustainability, deliver value for money, and support the wider goals of economic, environmental, and social well-being.
- 24 The draft financial planning assessment will be subject to further refinement and updated in the final assessment presented to the Authority at its meeting on 20 January 2025.

## IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	This report links to the Authority's Improvement and Well-being Objectives. It reports on the financial viability of the Authority.
Budget	The initial planning assessment has indicated a budget requirement of £52.8m.
Legal	The Authority has a legal duty to set a balanced budget based on realistic planning assumptions.
Staffing	70% of expenditure relates to staff costs and therefore is a material factor when considering future financial stability. The risks identified by the Chief Fire Officer include ongoing pay negotiations as well as the need to recruit further retained duty staff and build corporate resilience.
Equalities/Human Rights/Welsh Language	These issues will be factored into budget setting proposals.
Risks	The key risks and uncertainties to the 2025/26 budget have been outlined in Appendix 1.

**Appendix 1  
Summary of planning assumptions and risks**

Heading	Planning assumptions used in budget setting	Risks/Uncertainties
Employee costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The staffing budgets will be formulated on existing service delivery models and reflective of the decision of the outcome of the Fire and Rescue Authority’s Emergency Cover Review in December 2023.</li> <li>• RDS expenditure has been based on the 2023/24 headcount. Budgeting for the full required establishment would result in an additional cost of approximately £3 million.</li> <li>• The planning assessment for pay awards for 2025/26 is an increase of 3% for all staff groups.</li> <li>• The 2024/25 firefighter settlement included an uplift of circa 50% in the retaining fee paid to firefighters on the retained and day crewing duty systems. The impact of this increase is an estimated £1m per annum.</li> <li>• During 2023/24 the Welsh Government revised the flow of funds in relation to financial support for increases to the employer contributions associated with the firefighters’ pension scheme. Following the 2016 actuarial valuations £1.1m of support was provided to the Authority directly from the Welsh Government (known as SCAPE funding). From 2023/24 this has been included within funding to constituent local authorities. At the time of writing the financial support for the increase arising from the 2020 valuation has not yet been confirmed. For the purpose of budget setting all costs are included within expenditure to be met from the levy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The National Joint Council (NJC) has not yet reached agreement on the firefighter pay award for 2025/26.</li> <li>• The National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services has not yet reached agreement on the pay award for staff on LGPS contracts for 2025/26.</li> <li>• The budget planning assumes normal levels of activity. If spate conditions occur budget pressures will be experienced. The working assumption is that the General Fund would be utilised in the first instance.</li> </ul>

Heading	Planning assumptions used in budget setting	Risks/Uncertainties
Non-Pay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The initial planning assessment has confirmed that the non-pay budgets will be formulated on existing service delivery models.</li> <li>• The demands on the non-pay budget are further exacerbated by the inflationary impact inherent within existing and future contracts and supply chain issues in a number of business-critical areas. These include the supply of firefighting kit and the sourcing of replacement parts for operational vehicles.</li> <li>• Unavoidable costs associated with industry specific health and safety matters have been included within the non-pay budget. These include costs associated with the training of operational firefighters and the management of contaminants.</li> <li>• Budgets have been formulated by each relevant Head of Department based on their knowledge and professional judgement of expenditure necessary to achieve corporate objectives. This includes a review of underlying contractual obligations and estimates of activity. New requests for funding over £10,000 are subject to a business case which is subject to scrutiny.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whilst the Service continues to review non-pay costs and strives to manage cost pressures within the planned budget this remains an area of risk and uncertainty. In particular, it has been noted that delays in the delivery of goods or services have impacted on the time profiles of expenditure.</li> <li>• Although cost inflation is generally more manageable than in recent years it is noted that some areas of concern remain. This includes increases in licences associated with software including business critical systems.</li> <li>• The cost of gas and electricity has been a known cost pressure since 2022/23 due to global cost pressures. The position appears to have stabilised and the budget for 2025/26 is predicated on best estimates at this time. However, volatility in the market continues and this is carefully managed throughout the financial year.</li> <li>• During 2023/24 the Welsh Government removed its financial support of £0.4m for the existing national emergency services communication network (Firelink). The full contract price is now funded directly from core funding. Due to the fixed nature of this contract these costs are unavoidable and the contract includes an annual inflationary increase. The full year cost is £1m per annum although following a national legal challenge this may reduce to £0.5m. The national legal challenge is subject to appeal and the final outcome remains uncertain, however, the cost reduction has been included as part of budget setting.</li> </ul>

Heading	Planning assumptions used in budget setting	Risks/Uncertainties
Capital Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The capital financing requirement for 2025/26 includes the revenue charge for the minimum revenue provision for existing assets and an estimate of the interest charges arising from borrowing. These costs are influenced by historical capital expenditure, the need to borrow for the 2025/26 capital programme and the impact of interest rate increases when re-financing maturing loans.</li> <li>• The initial planning assessment assumes that all future borrowing will be at the prevailing PWLB rate at the time of budget setting, currently estimated at 4.5%. The Authority receives independent advice and guidance on this matter from Arlingclose, a specialist advisory company.</li> <li>• The capital plan includes potential costs associated with business cases submitted by each Head of Department. This includes some provision for initial costs associated with the Training Centre Project to enable a detailed business case and funding model to be developed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The increase in interest rates in recent years is a key risk area and is exacerbated as a number of loans require refinancing during the 2025/26 financial year. Financial modelling will be undertaken to assess the affordability of all proposals during the budget setting process.</li> <li>• The timing of any costs associated with a new training centre are unknown at this stage as the business case has not been considered by the Authority. Although it is not anticipated that the final business case and funding options will not be presented for approval until 2027 provision for costs associated with detailed planning applications will be included in the initial budget estimates.</li> </ul>
Income	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Income budgets have been reviewed and set in line with previous years, subject to inflationary increases. These largely relate to income from property where our sites are jointly occupied.</li> <li>• Welsh Government grant income reduced significantly in recent years and the budget setting will assume that remaining Welsh Government grant funding will be received at 2024/25 levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No specific risks have been identified over and above the grant income from the Welsh Government for which inflationary uplifts are not anticipated.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 2

### Draft financial levy by local authority

Authority	2024/2025 Contribution £	Population	2025/26 Budget Requirement (Levy) £	Increase in Levy £	Increase in Levy %	Real terms Levy increase* %
Anglesey Council	4,848,293	69,291	5,190,383	342,090	6.96%	4.94%
Gwynedd Council	8,256,681	119,173	8,926,896	670,214	8.02%	5.98%
Conwy County Borough Council	8,024,901	114,410	8,570,114	545,213	6.70%	4.68%
Denbighshire County Council	6,779,844	97,156	7,277,668	497,824	7.24%	5.22%
Flintshire County Council	10,905,762	155,812	11,624,223	718,461	6.92%	4.90%
Wrexham County Borough Council	9,506,724	136,149	10,198,518	691,794	7.18%	5.15%
<b>Total</b>	<b>48,322,205</b>	<b>691,991</b>	<b>51,787,801</b>	<b>3,465,596</b>	<b>7.17%</b>	<b>5.15%</b>

\* This is the % increase in the levy when adjusting for SCAPE funding top-up of £0.207m for 2024/25 and changes to Employers National Insurance threshold and rates of £0.772m.

Report to	<b>North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority</b>
Date	<b>20 January 2025</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Helen MacArthur, Assistant Chief Officer, Finance and Resources</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Helen MacArthur</b>
Subject	<b>Welsh Government Consultation – employee contribution rates for the firefighters' pension scheme</b>



## PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) with information on the Welsh Government's consultation on proposed changes to the employee contribution rates for the firefighters' pension scheme in Wales.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The Welsh Government is currently consulting on proposed changes to the employee contribution rates and contribution structure within the Firefighters' Pension Scheme (FPS) in Wales. The consultation document can be found [here](#).
- 3 The 2020 valuation of the firefighters' pension scheme undertaken by the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) identified that the yield from employee contributions was below the 13.2% yield required for the scheme. Employee contributions have special protection under section 22 of the Public Service Pensions Act 2013 and rates can only be amended following consultation.
- 4 The consultation document sets out a range of proposals and seeks comments via a series of structured questions by 4 February 2025.
- 5 The proposed response to be sent on behalf of the Authority is set out within [Appendix 1](#).

## OBSERVATIONS FROM THE LOCAL PENSION BOARD

- 6 This report has not previously been considered by the Local Pension Board due to the timing of the consultation.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7 It is recommended that Members:
- i) note the background to the Welsh Government consultation; and
  - ii) approve the response to be submitted on behalf of the Authority.

## BACKGROUND

- 8 The Welsh Ministers have responsibility for the regulations relating to the operation of the Firefighters Pension Scheme in Wales. These responsibilities include setting the employee and employer contribution rates.
- 9 Following the latest valuation undertaken in 2020, Members will recall that the contribution rates for employers were increased from April 2024. In addition, the Government Actuary's Department noted that the employee yield was lower than the required 13.2%. Accordingly, Welsh Ministers are required to review and revise the contribution rates to address this. However, due to special protections under section 22 of the Public Services Pensions Act 2013 the underpinning regulations can only be amended following consultation.
- 10 The Welsh Government consultation was published on 12 November 2024 and will close on 4 February 2025. The consultation can be viewed [here](#).

## INFORMATION

- 11 The underpinning principles considered when setting the employee rates are confirmed within the consultation document as:
- Contributions should be affordable, and the changes should not induce members to opt out of the scheme;
  - rates should be structured in favour of lower paid scheme members;
  - rates should not discourage career progressions;
  - the contribution rate structure should be future-proofed; and
  - the system should be straightforward to administer.
- 12 The current contribution rate structure includes contribution rates of between 11% and 14.5% based on pensionable pay, noting that competent firefighters pay a contribution of 12.9%. The consultation document includes the following options that are being considered:



- Maintain the current system but amend the contributions rates for each of the existing bands. This would be the simplest option but does not future proof the system.
  - Update the current system to introduce contributions on a marginal basis similar to the mechanism for determining tax. This means that an employee's contribution rate would vary. Whilst this does remove any disincentive for promotion due to higher contributions it does present significant administrative challenges.
  - Calculate contribution rates based on actual salary rather than whole-time salary (assumed pensionable pay). This would benefit on-call employees but would require the contribution rates for all staff to increase to ameliorate the impact.
  - Link contributions to grade structures set out within the Firefighters' Terms and Conditions of Service (the Grey book).
- 13 The consultation sets out nine structured questions around both the principles and the different options for structuring the employee rates. The proposed response to be submitted on behalf of the Authority in its capacity of Scheme Manager is set out in [Appendix 1](#).
- 14 The proposed response confirms that linking contributions to grade structures provides an easy to administer approach that supports the principles established. However, this option in its current form contains a disincentive effect for employees considering promotion due to the significant effect of widening the contribution rates between bands. This option includes a proposed a reduction in contributions for firefighters but increases the contributions for crew managers and above. Subject to this disincentive effect being addressed this remains the preferred option.
- 15 In addition, feedback is provided to the Welsh Government around the timing of the introduction of any changes. This is necessary both to communicate with those affected and also to ensure that the necessary administrative changes can be made including software updates.

## IMPLICATIONS

Wellbeing Objectives	The proposed changes align to the Wellbeing Objectives and provide for a sustainable and affordable pension scheme.
Budget	No impact – the consultation is based on employee contribution rates.
Legal	The Authority is under a legal duty to ensure compliance with the Scheme Regulations.
Staffing	This matter directly impacts on employees who are members of the public sector pension schemes offered by the Authority; depending on the scheme, members may choose to opt out of the pension scheme.
Equalities/ Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The proposals have been subject to an equality impact assessment by the Welsh Government.
Risks	The proposals address the risk that the employee yield on the firefighters' pension scheme will not be achieved.

## Appendix 1 – Proposed responses

### Question 1

**How far do you agree that the new structure should be underpinned by the principles outlined above? Do you think some principles are more important than others?**

#### Underpinning Principles

- **Contributions should be affordable, and the changes should not induce members to opt out of the scheme**

Affordability is a basic principle required to ensure that all staff plan and contribute towards their retirement which needs to be balanced off against the sustainability of the scheme. However, this is clearly a risk that needs to be carefully modelled and managed as increasing contributions may make members consider opting out, which in turn would then leave fewer members to fund the scheme.

- **Rates should be structured in favour of lower paid scheme members.**

The principle of affordability is closely aligned to structuring the rates to best favour those employees who are lower paid. This approach is currently an accepted and simple mechanism that individuals understand and accept and is supported by the Scheme Manager also.

- **Rates should not discourage career progression**

This principle is agreed. Whilst members currently accept that an increase in salary, due to promotion, may indeed require them to pay more contributions, this is understood and members recognise that under the CARE principle of the 2015 Scheme, the more they contribute the higher their pension will be when they retire. Any new structure should not introduce perceived barriers to promotion due to an unrealistic increase to pension contributions.

- **The contribution rate structure should be future-proofed**

To the extent that this is achievable, this principle is agreed. The existing employee contribution structure has been in place for a number of years but has not kept pace with salary increase due to annual pay awards. This in itself has contributed to the current need for a fundamental review, in order to meet the required yield of 13.2%. However, it should also be noted that ongoing discussions around modernising firefighter salaries at a national level may impact on this aspiration.

- **The system should be straightforward to administer**

This principle is fully supported both to reduce the administrative burden but also to reduce the risk of error. Any fundamental changes to the current contribution structure need to be practical and workable for all stakeholders. Members need to easily understand what they are expected to pay, payroll systems need to be able to manage the structure of deductions automatically without manual intervention and administrators need to also understand how an individual's salary is constructed in order to ensure that contributions are being deducted correctly.

## Question 2

**How far do you agree that employee pension contributions should be calculated on a marginal basis, rather than a tiered basis?**

Whilst the introduction of a marginal based structure would enable a greater feeling of fairness, with those on higher salaries paying additional contributions only on salary above the basic bandings, any fundamental changes to the current contribution structure would need to be practical and workable for all stakeholders.

Members need to easily understand what they are expected to pay, payroll systems need to be able to manage the structure of deductions automatically without manual intervention and administrators need to also understand how an individual's salary is constructed in order to ensure that contributions are being deducted correctly.

If there is a move to a marginal basis, compared to a tiered basis, the proposed implementation date of April 2025 would be unachievable, as significant changes to the way current payroll systems are configured would need to be updated and tested. Payroll managers would need to be included in this avenue of thought, as well as their payroll system providers. It would not be practical to change the contribution structure if it led to manual calculations of employee contributions needing to be done on a regular basis.

Even with the introduction of a marginal approach, thought would still need to be given to the bandings and percentages increases above the basic rate applied to all.

## Question 3

**How far do you agree that employee pension contributions should be based on the Fire Service grade structure rather than by financial banding?**

Whilst members currently accept that an increase in salary, due to promotion, may indeed require them to pay more contributions, this is understood and members recognise that under the CARE principle of the 2015 Scheme, the more they contribute the higher their pension will be when they retire. Any new structure should not introduce perceived barriers to promotion due to a realistic increase to pension contributions.

Moving towards a structure based on Fire Service grades rather than salary, ensures that any salary increases are captured and future proofs the banding structure into the future. However, this approach needs to be mindful of future national discussions around modernising of firefighter pay and the potential for crossover of salary bands within the fire service grades.

Given the contribution proposals set out in the consultation document, it is highly possible that some members may be deterred from applying for promotion due to the increase in contributions, especially whilst on development pay. Additionally, this approach could inadvertently introduce a culture of extended temporary promotions, which enable the member to remain in their previous banding, as temporary promotions are not pensionable in the 2015 Scheme. Whilst the principle of structuring rates is in favour of lower paid employees, this may be perceived as changing the balance out of favour of those seeking promotion. Overall whilst this appears a good, workable and easy to administer proposal, a review of the contribution levels for each grade would further enhance this option.

Additionally, structure based on grades affords complete transparency and enables individuals to understand what contributions they should be paying.

#### **Question 4**

**How far do you agree that contributions should continue to be calculated by reference to wholetime equivalent salary rather than actual pensionable pay?**

The proposal to move towards contributions based on actual pensionable pay would benefit on-call members and would potentially lead to them paying less contributions overall. However, to maintain the yield it would be necessary to adjust the contributions of all wholetime staff and result in higher contributions than set out within other options.

Although it accords with the principle of favouring the lower paid employees, there is potential for this different approach to become divisive amongst members and this would need to be carefully managed.

This approach also moves the on-call members away from the role-based principal, which is the option being suggested for the future.

#### **Question 5**

**How far do you agree with the detailed proposal set out in paragraphs 37- 40 above?**

Placing all on-call firefighters on a single contribution rate accords with the principle that rates are structured for lower paid employees. Equally, this potentially removes a perceived barrier to promotion within the on-call cohort of staff. Although relatively easy to administer it would require updates to existing software and therefore an implementation date of April 2025 would not be achievable.

However, the impact for wholetime staff of the proposed contribution rates currently set out within table would need to be worked through to ensure that the increase for wholetime staff was neither divisive nor negatively perceived to the extent that employees left the pension scheme.

### Question 6

**If you do not agree with the proposal outlined above, do you have an alternative suggestion of how the contribution rate should be structured?**

The proposals set out within Option 3, modified for on-call employees, provide a clear methodology. The potential detrimental effects for those seeking promotion could be addressed through narrowing the contribution rates between all grades of staff, whilst maintaining the principle that lower paid staff pay less.

### Question 7

**We would like to know your views on the effects that the above proposals would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English. What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?**

No impact

### Question 8

**Please also explain how you believe the proposed policy could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.**


No impact

### Question 9

**We have asked a number of specific questions. Do you have any other comments on our proposals or any related issues which we have not specifically addressed?**

- It is important that Scheme Managers have sufficient time to make any administrative changes including updates to software for payroll systems. Accordingly, achieving an implementation date of April 2025 is not considered achievable. Furthermore, introducing the changes retrospectively will create an administrative burden and create concern for employees.
- If Wales brings in a new contribution structure from April 2025, there is potential for that to be somewhat different to the changes that are introduced in England, Scotland and NI. It is noted that the Home Office is currently working to an October 2025 implementation date in England.

- As a Scheme Manager we would prefer a later implementation date to ensure not only that administration and software changes are made, but also that communication takes place with employees to explain the changes and the potential impact. The workloads on existing teams should be considered given the work around existing legal challenges.
- If affordability is considered a significant impediment to joining the pension scheme an alternative approach may include the introduction of a 50/50 option similar to the LGPS. However, it is understood that this may negatively impact on the yield as those on higher salaries may be more inclined to take advantage of this option.
- Has consideration been given to aligning the approach in Wales with the firefighters' pension schemes in England and other devolved nations? Any divergence could potentially affect cross border transfers due to different contribution rates, leading to higher or lower pensions in Wales. Also, we need to be mindful that significant changes to administration processes and current practices may increase the cost of these contracts to the Services across Wales.

Report to	<b>North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority</b>	
Date	<b>20 January 2025</b>	
Lead Officer	<b>Stewart Forshaw, Deputy Chief Fire Officer</b>	
Contact Officer	<b>Sandra Williams, Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation</b>	
Subject	<b>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Performance Assessment 2023-2024</b>	

## PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 This paper is presented for Members' approval of the annual assessment of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's (the Authority) performance during 2023/24 in relation to:
  - i) Its progress towards achieving its long-term Strategic Equality Action Plan 2020-2024; and
  - ii) its compliance with The Equality Act (2010).

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 The Equality Act (2010) requires the Authority to write an equality plan every four years. The Authority's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 identifies five priorities. These priorities are broken down into six equality objectives that the Authority wants to help bring about to make Wales a fairer place to live.
- 3 Having identified these objectives, the Authority has a duty to take all reasonable steps to pursue them and to report publicly after the end of each financial year on the progress it has made.
- 4 The Annual Performance Assessment 2023/24 further demonstrates how the Authority has continued to make good progress against all five priorities.

## RECOMMENDATION

### 5 That Members:

- i) **Approve the annual assessment of the Authority's performance in 2023/24 for publication on the Authority's website; and**
- ii) **Note the Service's intention to publish a simple summary version of the key elements of the assessment report.**



## BACKGROUND

- 6 The Authority is required under various pieces of legislation to give a public account of its performance, progress and compliance. These include the Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011 which requires the Authority to produce a Strategic Equality Plan every four years and to report annually on the progress that it has made towards fulfilling its equality objectives.
- 7 In previous years the Authority has included the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Annual Performance Assessment, along with compliance against Welsh Language Standards, as part of the publication of the Annual Performance Assessment. However, this year these have been separated into separate reports.
- 8 The standalone EDI Annual Performance Assessment 2023/24 details evidence of how each of the five priorities in the Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 have been progressed during the final year of the current plan.

## INFORMATION

- 9 The five priorities within the Authority's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 are broken down into six equality objectives that the Authority wants to help bring about to make Wales a fairer place to live. The aim of the Equality Act is to ensure that everyone has the right to:
  - Promote the equality of opportunity;
  - Foster good relations; and
  - Eliminate discrimination
- 10 Starting with Priority 1, which focuses on Life and Health and covers Equality Objective 1, the report describes how prevention and protection teams continue to offer a consistent and inclusive service and how by developing new personal data and data sharing agreements, the Authority has been able to adapt its approach to using protected characteristics to identify groups of people that are at increased risk of fire in the home and work to tailor safety messages.
- 11 With Priority 2, which relates to Employment and covers Equality Objective 2, the assessment covers the range of initiatives that have been progressed aimed at increasing the employment prospects of people who might otherwise find it difficult to gain equal access to the world of work and advance gender equality in North Wales. This section gives examples of how roles have been advertised with breakdowns of the responses.

- 12 Priority 3 relates to Education and covers how the Authority has continued to develop an inclusive culture where leaders and staff demonstrate their commitment to promoting equality and support for a fair and inclusive workforce. This section also includes how there has been a continued delivery of specific EDI training for leaders across all levels of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) with this provision informing best practice and acknowledges that various policies and procedures have been updated throughout 2023/24. This encompasses Equality Objective 3.
- 13 Priority 4 covers personal safety and the work around reducing the risk of death and injury through the provision of effective prevention and protection services and emergency response. Examples of how Welsh Language has been further embedded into the delivery of key safety messages is also included within this section. Other examples of how this priority has been met include work the Service has delivered within the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities during key safety campaigns. Details of a community event in February 2024 by the Services Firepride Staff Network also enhances the evidence against Equality Objectives 4 and 5.
- 14 Priority 5 is focused on participation and communication and Equality Objective 6, detailing how important it is to be open and accountable about what we do and what the plans are to encourage more people to involve themselves in the process of determining the way Fire and Rescue Services are delivered in North Wales. The engagement work undertaken during the consultation for the Emergency Cover Review gave good evidence against this priority, as Equality Impact Assessments were conducted at different stages of the project and a full Equality Analysis Report was produced following the consultation.
- 15 The Assessment also refers to the variety of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received by the Service in relation to its EDI work. Some requests related to gender equality, LGBTQ+ communities, harassment cases and some that were specific to the expenditure on EDI activities.

## IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	This report links to the Authority's Improvement and Well-being Goals/Ways of working by providing examples of how these have been met through the delivery of The Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 and its priorities and Equality Objectives.
Budget	Priorities for the EDI budget is based on the delivery of the objectives
Legal	The Equality Act (2010) requires the Authority to write a Strategic Equality Plan every four years and to report annually on its performance. 2023/2024 is the final year of the current plan.
Staffing	The Authority employs an EDI Officer to oversee the delivery of the Strategic Equality Plan and to monitor progress by reporting through the governance structure and by producing the annual performance assessment.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	These are all included in the monitoring reports to the EDI committee and in the annual performance assessment.
Risks	Any risks are included in the risk register.



Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub  
Fire and Rescue Service

# Strategic Equality Action Plan 2020 -24

## Annual Performance Report: Progress against Strategic Equality Objectives 2023-24



**ATAL AMDDIFFYFN YMATEB  
PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING**

# Strategic Equality Action Plan 2020-2024

## PROGRESS AGAINST STRATEGIC EQUALITY OBJECTIVES 2023/24

### What the Act requires the Authority to do

The Equality Act (2010) requires the Authority to write an equality plan every four years. The Authority's Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2024 identifies five priorities. These priorities are broken down into six equality objectives that the Authority wants to help bring about to make Wales a fairer place to live. The aim of the Equality Act is to ensure that everyone has the right to:

- Promote the equality of opportunity;
- foster good relations; and
- eliminate discrimination.

The categories for the objectives are based on the area headings in the Equality and Human Rights Commission's "How Fair is Wales" document. These headings also align with the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network Strategic Equality Plan; this enables joint objectives to be included in individual public sector organisations' strategic equality plans.

Having identified these objectives, the Authority has a duty to take all reasonable steps to pursue them and to report publicly after the end of each financial year on the progress it has made. The Equality Act lists a number of characteristics which must be taken into consideration when determining the actions to be undertaken. These are the 'protected characteristics':

- Age;
- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Marriage and civil partnership;
- Pregnancy and maternity;
- Race;
- Religion and/or belief
- Sex; and
- Sexual orientation.

Socioeconomic status is not a protected characteristic, but in Wales, public sector organisations show due regard and consideration to ensure people are not disadvantaged and discriminated against as a result of their socioeconomic status.

A number of sources have been used to develop the Authority's strategic equality objectives including equality analysis; combined improvement and risk reduction planning objectives; business plans from Heads of Departments; existing strategies and plans; and outcome of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) related campaigns and engagement activities.

Legislation allows for the objectives to be changed at any time, therefore ongoing evaluation is undertaken to ensure objectives remain current. The Authority continuously examines the most effective methods of communication via engagement with all relevant stakeholders. The Authority is required to publish this assessment of its own performance for 2023/24.

## Priority 1 – Life and Health

### Equality Objective 1

Reduce dwelling fires and associated casualties through a comprehensive prevention strategy that specifically targets people living in North Wales who can be shown to be at greater risk because they may share one or more particular characteristic.

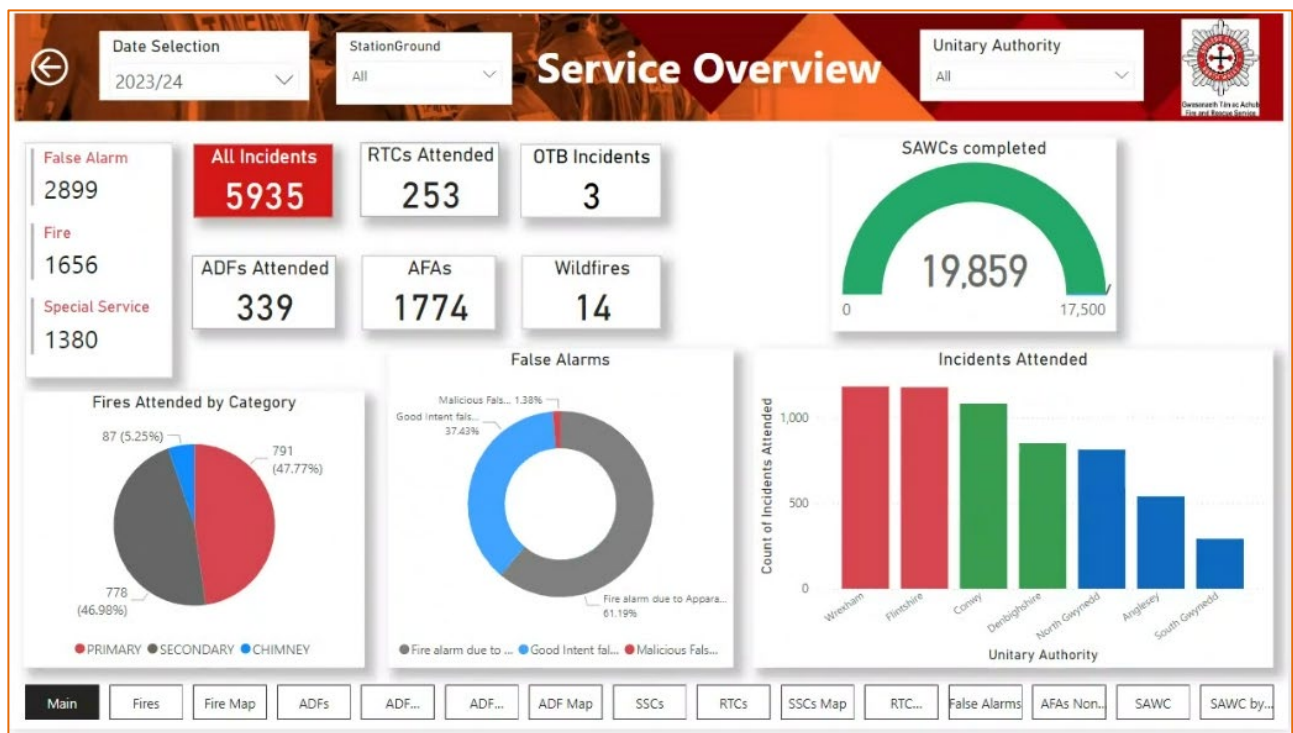
#### **Working to achieve this objective, the Authority has:**

- North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) continues to deliver against its annual targets. Partnership Managers continue to progress their work engaging with the most at-risk people in our communities. For example, the Service continues to increase the number of partnerships with community groups, places of worship and charities in the past year. These partnerships enable our staff to connect with people from diverse backgrounds and those who are seldom heard.



- In 2023, the prevention department worked in partnership with Flintshire Council to launch a pilot project which involved installing Stoveguard fire detection devices in homes of 17 'at risk' older people living in high rise buildings. The Stoveguard technology simply turns off the cooker when the sensor detects that a person has left cooking unattended for a set period of time or situations where the cooker gets too hot or when food/oil is burning. The initial intervention in 2022/23 resulted in 218 activations which enables the resident to avoid potential kitchen fires, thus reducing a demand on our operational response.
- Building on the Service's extensive contacts with care companies that support people living with dementia, another innovative prevention project in Flintshire and Wrexham (East area) was launched in February 2024. The project surrounds a referral system which signposts any person that is diagnosed with dementia in the east area to our service and they will receive free installation of the Stoveguard technology in their homes.
- Like other departments, prevention and protection teams complete mandatory Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) e-learning to introduce (and refresh) basic knowledge. These teams also complete bespoke EDI training to ensure there is a high standard and consistent service to the community. In addition, operational staff that deliver prevention activities complete bespoke training to ensure there is a consistent and inclusive service

delivery.



- During 2023/24, the Corporate Planning team have started to develop a new data dashboard. The early work on this very exciting development indicates this new dashboard will provide a real time picture of incident data which can be used to inform the service’s decision making including its priorities and planning of future prevention work.
- Through personal data and data sharing agreements with external partners, our service has been able to use protected characteristics to identify groups of people that are at an increased risk of fire in the home. This approach has helped our service target specific groups of people and adapt the ways we communicate with them as a means of keeping them safe. For example, we are working closely with Dementia support groups to promote tailored safety messages to hundreds of people and families living with dementia.



- The Census data and official updates continue to inform our Service of recent changes to its community, population and demographics. This insight plays a key role in aligning the service’s recruitment and prevention priorities and activities.

## Priority 2 – Employment

### Equality Objective 2

Through our own employment practices, programmes and schemes we aim to increase the employment prospects of people who might otherwise find it difficult to gain equal access to the world of work. We will prioritise action to advance gender equality in North Wales.

#### **Working to achieve this objective, the Authority has:**

- Recruitment Information Packs bespoke for each vacancy include information on the Welsh language requirements, the daily duties of the role, and the person to contact for further information. The aim of these booklets is to provide all the information an applicant would require in one place, as well as highlight a point of contact. The booklets are available in different formats to widen access.



- A North Wales Fire Careers page on Facebook advertises upcoming and current vacancies across the Service. All posts are created bilingually in compliance with Service Guidelines and Welsh Language Standards. The page went live in early February 2023 and has gained 302 followers and 182 page likes. A post highlighting what a typical day at the Joint Communications Centre looked like was posted in order to gain interest in the Firefighter Control vacancies and reached 17,989 people with 1,521 people engaging with it. Once the vacancies went live, the post advertising the vacancy reached 24,452 people, and 2,093 people engaged with the post, resulting in 20 applications for the vacancy (compared to 8 received during the previous campaign). Another post advertising a role within our Corporate Communications team through the medium of Welsh reached 1,493 people and 49 people engaged with the post resulting in a successful applicant. The aim of the page is to raise the profile of Corporate Services roles and encourage more applications, however this has now been opened up for use by the Recruitment and Availability teams to raise awareness with regards to our On-Call Firefighter roles.



Service to the community | People | Striving for excellence | Diversity and inclusivity

## CURRENT VACANCIES

- ICT Digital Transformation Officer, Conwy – closes 12/06/23
- Digital Engagement Officer, St Asaph – closes 19/06/23
- Senior Finance Officer – Management Accounting, St Asaph – closes 29/06/23
- ICT Infrastructure Engineer, Conwy – 10/07/23



**Upcoming Vacancies**  
please keep an eye on our website and social media for further roles being advertised

**Live Fear Free Helpline**  
0808 8010 800  
Call 'Fear' free staff - online  
Homes shouldn't be a place of fear  
Help is available 24/7


**Cefnogywr Pride Tân**  
Fire Pride Allies

We are an equal opportunity employer and welcome applications from all sections of the community. We are committed to equality of opportunity for all staff and applications from individuals are encouraged regardless of age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and marriage and civil partnerships. We welcome correspondence and calls in Welsh and English and we will respond equally to both and will reply in your language of choice without delay. Applications submitted in Welsh will be treated no less favourably than an application submitted in English.

Service to the community | People | Striving for excellence | Diversity and inclusivity

## CURRENT VACANCIES

- Business Support Administrator – On-Call Duty System, South Gwynedd (Dolgellau or Porthmadog) – closes 07/11/2023
- Head of ICT, Conwy – closes 10/11/2023
- On-call vacancies (Abersoch, Chirk, Conwy, Holywell, Menai Bridge & Rhyl)



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- During 2023/24, the Service developed several positive action interventions (e.g. see posters above) which have helped promote careers amongst talented and diverse people that are traditionally underrepresented in our workforce. Targeted communication to underrepresented groups through social influencers that have developed trust and rapport within specific communities is an effective way to promote careers and specific job roles.
- Positive action activities also include delivering informal career workshops at community centres, careers events, places of worship, leisure centres, colleges and universities. These targeted activities help to ensure people from all backgrounds across North Wales have access to information which enables them to make an informed decision regarding a potential career in NWFRS.



- Human Resources (HR) staff have utilised their own social media channels such as LinkedIn, Facebook and X (formerly Twitter) to promote any upcoming Corporate Services vacancies to gather interest ahead of the vacancies going live. This approach has helped promote career opportunities through the wider networks of other HR professionals and recruitment contacts.



- Attendance at recruitment events has continued and this engagement has allowed the Service to connect with job seekers in our local communities and promote the great opportunities on offer for both Corporate Services and Operational/Control roles. This also gives the HR and Recruitment & Availability teams the opportunity to discuss with potential applicants any barriers they may be experiencing so these can be reviewed and addressed where possible. The photos (See above) provide two examples how the Service has engaged with children and young adults in college and school settings. Specific targeting of people based on their age, race, disability, sexual orientation and geographical location is undertaken to ensure people that are traditionally underrepresented in our workforce are aware of the potential careers available to them.



- HR have also worked with the Corporate Communications department to produce short social media videos. The promotion of various roles within the Service is particularly useful to improve engagement with Welsh speakers and explaining why Welsh language is needed for some roles and removing barriers to applicants where Welsh is not essential as a day one skill.

- Throughout 2023/24, the service has progressed its work concerning initial dyslexia checklists and cognitive screening which help identify employee's strengths, challenges and preferences relating learning and development. This process enables the service to identify, consider and implement relevant reasonable adjustments and support, particularly for employees that are neurodivergent.

- Dyslexia checklists and 'Do-It' cognitive screening is offered to new employers when they start their employment with the service. Checklists are included in new starter packs during their induction and this enables the service to offer appropriate support at the start of a person's career. Naturally, existing employees can access checklists, screening and support is widely promoted through specific campaigns and via the usual media channels including the intranet, workplace and weekly brief updates.
- Throughout 2023/24, the service has supported 32 employees to complete a British Dyslexia Association checklist which indicates whether an employee may experience some barriers with learning and development.
- In addition, 19 employees have been supported to complete the more comprehensive Do-It Profiler screening. This process generates an evidence-based report that offers the individual strategies to overcome their challenges and a list of reasonable adjustments is available for the service to consider and implement.
- In some cases, several workplaces need's assessments have been conducted for individuals to ensure they are able to overcome challenges they experience and reasonable adjustments are implemented as a way of promoting equality of opportunity, widened access and enabling employees to thrive, develop and perform in their respective roles.



- During 2023/24, the **total number of employees** in the Service has increased from 901 to 906.
- During 2023/24, the diversity of **employees identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT+)** has increased from 23 (2.6%) to 28 (3.1%). This equates to a 0.5% increase. In addition, the disclosure rates of LGBT+ staff has continued to increase in the past year and this demonstrates that people are becoming more comfortable and feel confident to be themselves at work.
- During 2023/24, the Service have increased the **ethnic diversity of the workforce** from 29 (3.2%) to 30 (3.3%). This equates to a 0.1% increase. However, there is now a broader range of ethnic groups represented in the workforce compared to 2022/23.
- During 2023/24, the Service have seen a slight decrease in the overall **number of females** from 194 (21.5%) to 192 (21.3%) across all roles. This equates to a 0.3% decrease.
- The Service has sustained the number of **females in Corporate Services** roles which was 79 in 2022/23 and 2023/24 respectively.
- The **number of females in Operational roles** has decreased slightly from 115 (15.1%) to 113 (14.8%) during the past year. This equates to a 0.3% reduction. It is worth highlighting that 50% of the Service Principal Officers are female and females are represented across all levels of management.
- In addition, many **females continue to progress in the promotion process** across Operational, Fire Control and Corporate Services roles and this is positively reflected in the reduction of the Services [Gender Pay Gap](#) in their 2023 report.
- During 2023/24, the Service have seen a slight decrease in **employees with a disability** from 124 to 116 in the past year.

## Priority 3 – Education

### Equality Objective 3

We will progress an inclusive culture where leaders and staff demonstrate their commitment to promoting equality and support for a fair and inclusive workforce.

**Working to achieve this objective, the Authority has:**



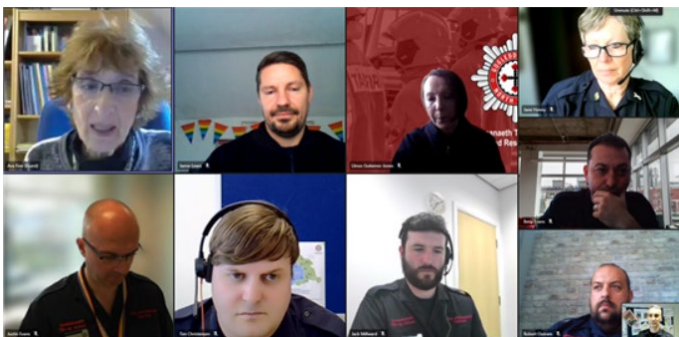
- NWFRS has five established staff networks, namely; Firepride Network, Women in the Fire Service, Neurodiversity Network, Parent and Carers and Religion Ethnicity and Cultural Heritage (REACH). Each network as an appointed Chair and they meet on a quarterly basis. Staff networks add value and they enable staff with specific needs and aspirations to share ideas, offer advice and raise concerns.
- Staff networks continue to play a key role in promoting different awareness campaigns and using these platforms to informally educate the rest of the workforce through sharing their lived experiences, storytelling and offering advice that informs new perspective. Each staff network has a senior leader sponsor who attend meetings, organise events and actively champion inclusion.
- The Corporate Policy Development Managers have continued to support departments to develop new policies and review existing policies. Various people related policies have been developed which each play a part in creating an inclusive culture. In addition, policies relating to new equipment, welfare unit, special appliances have all been reviewed with equality and inclusion of a diverse workforce in mind.
- In 2023, the confidential 'safe call' service was introduced and it is now well embedded. This anonymous feature provides employees with an alternative option should they wish to report any concerns relating to inappropriate, discriminatory behavior or misconduct.
- The continued delivery of specific EDI training for leaders across all levels of the Service and this provision has informed best practice. Training topics include Equality Impact Assessments, Inclusive Workplace Practices, Unconscious Bias and Deaf Awareness. Feedback from staff help to improve training design, content and delivery.



- The Service has developed further guidance documents relating to different religious and cultural observances, festivals and celebrations. The Service has enhanced its suite of inclusive guidance documents through the development of further guides in 2023/24. The guides are readily available on the intranet to enable staff and managers to access evidence-based advice and to promote inclusion amongst their teams.
- The Corporate Policy Development Managers have updated various people policies and procedures throughout 2023/24. The policy development process includes consultation and equality analysis to ensure they are fit for purpose and promote inclusion. These policies underpin the processes and practices that promote an inclusive workplace.
- Further work has been completed to ensure the Service reduces the gender pay gap. Gender pay gap data for 2023/24 has been submitted to the government and the relevant narrative has been included in an annual report which has been published on our website as per the legislative reporting requirements.
- The Equality Monitoring Report 2023/24 includes all employment data identified by the Welsh Specific Equality Duty 2011. This report ensures the Service publish data relating to overall workforce figures, contract type, full-time, part-time, leavers, training received and top 5% earners. This information enables the Authority to monitor the diversity of its workforce and plan positive action activity accordingly.
- Initial dyslexia checklists and cognitive screening for new starters and existing employees have enabled leaders to adopt suitable communication methods and implement reasonable adjustments accordingly. This process ensures the Service can identify an individual's strengths, needs, preferences and challenges at the earliest possible opportunity. In line with the Equality Act 2010, this process is effective in terms of an employee's learning and development where reasonable adjustments are identified that enable employees to thrive and perform to the best of their ability.



- During 2023/24, the Service receive the esteemed Corporate Health Standard ‘Platinum Award’. The award is a significant achievement which and demonstrates a continued commitment to improving health and wellbeing of its employees.
- Best ‘EDI’ practices are organically embedded within the Corporate Health Standard criteria. This enabled the Service to demonstrate some inclusive practices for its employees, but also for the health and wellbeing of the community members they serve.



- Achieving the ‘Platinum Award’ was a genuine team effort. Leaders from across multiple departments worked together to gather evidence and showcase the Service’s work (as can be seen from the screenshot to the left).

• During 2023/24, a guidance document for employees with caring responsibilities was developed. The Service acknowledges care givers have specific needs, aspirations and challenges and the guidance aims to promote equality and inclusion.

- Several people policies have been updated during 2023/24 including Disability Retention, Redeployment Policy and Modified Duties Policy which includes reasonable adjustments.
- The Service believes that its employees are its most valuable asset, and is committed to attracting and retaining talented people. The Service acknowledge that traditional, office-based working arrangements may, in some cases, be incompatible with the increasing demand for a better work-life balance. The Service offer agile working arrangements to enable employees to establish an equilibrium between their working life and other priorities.
- The All-Wales People and Organisational Development Group (PODG) have developed a strategy that provides a framework for innovation, consistency, collaboration and partnership working between the three Fire and Rescue Services in Wales. This shared approach will enable the Service to safeguard employees and its communities and reflect on the priority areas of the Welsh Government’s most current Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales. In light of continuing budget pressures and increasing public expectations, this strategy supports the search for innovative ways of working to utilise the skills and professionalism of the FRS workforce for the benefit of the public.

## Equality Objective 4

Through a comprehensive programme of tailored education and advice provided singly and in collaboration, to empower people living, working and visiting North Wales to continue to reduce their own level of risk from fire and other hazards throughout the different stages in their lives.

### **Working to achieve this objective, the Authority has:**

- The Service's educationalists conducted 216 visits in 2023/24 and 20,837 children and young people were supported to access key safety advice and information.



- Through the school education programme, 202 school groups were engaged throughout 2023/24. This figure can be broken down to 163 primary school groups and 39 secondary schools. This has resulted in 14,941 primary school children and 5,378 secondary school children receiving key lifesaving safety information.
- The Service's educationalists have also delivered to 115 children in additional learning needs settings, 100 via local summer clubs, 95 children have visited the fire station through pre-arranged sessions with local groups and brownies. In addition, the educationalists have supported 196 young people to deliver mock interviews on subjects relating to fire safety and prevention strategies. Additional impacts of this engagement mean that young people are developing their own resilience to ensure they are safer in their home, on the road and in their communities.
- Further work to produce a comprehensive mapping exercise enables the service to identify equality interest groups across North Wales. Individual maps are being created for all 44 fire stations and this intelligence is useful for targeted interventions such as recruitment and promoting key safety messages. This insight also helps the service adopt appropriate communication and engagement methodology for engaging with specific audiences (i.e. geographical locations, people that live alone, different age groups).



## Priority 4 – Personal Safety

### Equality Objective 5

Reduce the risk of death or injury from fires in North Wales by the provision of effective prevention and protection services and emergency response.

**Working to achieve this objective, the Authority has:**



- The service has continued to deliver Welsh Language Training to new starters and continued professional development to advance the Welsh language skills of existing employees. One third of our workforce are fluent Welsh speakers which enable our service to communicate key safety messages, attend community events, receive emergency calls and to effectively respond to emergencies to people who speak Welsh as a primary language.
- In addition to the standard level two Welsh Language Training for employees, the service offers advanced training for those wishing to enhance their language skills even further. Various employees across all levels of the organisations are progressing through the levels and further coverage of these developments will be highlighted in the next annual review.
- To promote inclusion, employees are supported to develop their Welsh language skills through multiple methods including in-person training, online coaching sessions, written materials, CD's and audio clips which can be accessed on service devices or downloaded onto alternative platforms.



- The Service's Firepride Staff Network organised a community event in February 2024. The hybrid event hosted at Rhyf Community Fire Station and online brought community members, fire and rescue staff and external agencies together. The focus of the event was to champion inclusion, highlight issues concerning access to services and sharing best practices to improve service delivery in the future. Through collaboration and engagement, the service develops a rapport with community groups that are seldom heard and feedback that we do receive informs our recruitment activities, work planning and service delivery.



- Our partnership managers have worked closely with various partner agencies to organise further Dementia Walk and Talks events throughout 2023/24. In partnership with the National Trust and several care companies, over 50 people living with dementia have attended two 'walk and talk' sessions at Bodnant Gardens in Conwy and Erddig in Wrexham respectively. This specific engagement helps target people in the 'at risk' category where key safety advice can be provided to people living with dementia, carers and the wider family members. Many Safe and Well visits are scheduled through this engagement opportunity.



- In June 2023, as part of the service's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month campaign, the prevention team engaged specifically with travellers, boat dwellers and other people that live on boats along the Llangollen Canal. Due to the dynamic and transient lifestyle of people and families that live on canal boats, promoting key safety messages to this community can be challenging. However, the prevention team have worked with partner agencies such as the Canal and River Trust to identify specific times of the year that boats travel and reside in North Wales, thus creating an opportunity to offer Safe and Well Checks (SAWC) which includes providing key safety advice and installing fire detection devices if required.



- In December 2023, the prevention team expanded their well-established Christmas fire safety campaign to include travellers and other people that regularly reside on canal boats in North Wales. This specific engagement has built on some initial engagement with this community in June 2023. The engagement has extended the number of travellers that have now received a SAWC.
- In 2023/24, 40 bespoke SAWC's were conducted to individuals and families that live permanently live on canal boats in North Wales.

## Priority 5 – Participation and Communication

### Equality Objective 6

By being open and accountable about what we do and what our plans are, encourages more people to involve themselves in the process of determining the way Fire and Rescue Services are delivered in North Wales, and aim to increase the range of representative voices that contribute to that process.

**Working to achieve this objective, the Authority has:**



- As part of the Emergency Cover Review (ECR), the Service launched the largest public consultation in its history between 21 July 2023 and 22 September 2023. To promote active participation and inclusion, community members were able to provide feedback through a variety of methods including attending in person consultation sessions, complete online questionnaires, provide feedback via telephone or send their completed questionnaires via post.



- As part of the pre-consultation and full consultation, specific engagement with different equality interest groups enabled the Service to capture feedback from people across all protected characteristics, geographical areas and social backgrounds.

- As part of the ECR, Equality Impact Assessments were conducted at different stages of the project and a full Equality Analysis Report was produced at the end of the project. This insight helped to assess the potential impact of decision making on employees, community members and other external stakeholders, with the Service achieving a good practice award from the Consultation Institute on all stages of the consultation process



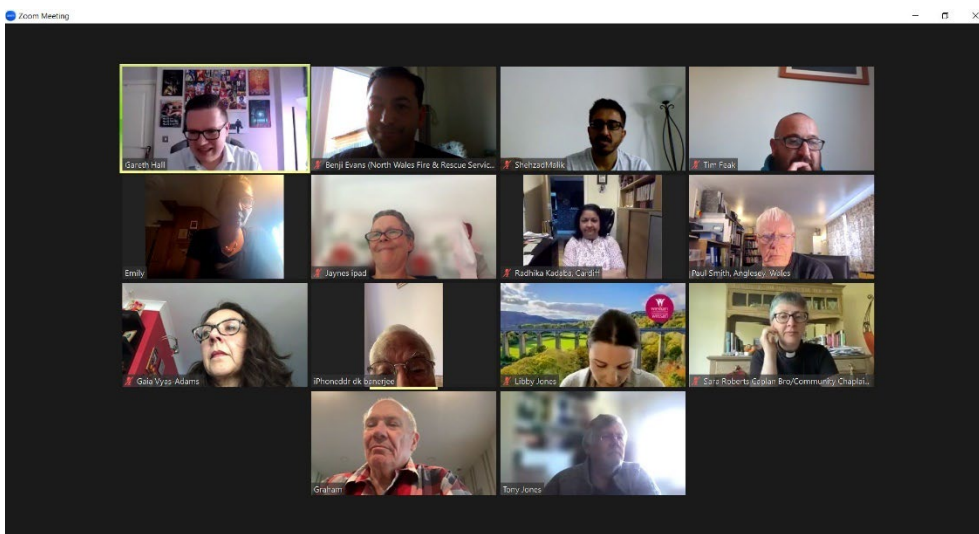
- During 2023/24, our Service received various Freedom of Information (FOI) requests relating to its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) work. Some requests relating to gender equality, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender plus (LGBT+) communities, harassment cases and some were specific to expenditure on EDI activities. The Service active publish information as a way of being open and transparent, although responses to FOI enables our Service to further demonstrate how their EDI work is helping them work towards strategic objectives.



- In March 2024, our Service launched its public consultation on the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-2029. The consultation involved capturing feedback from people across all age groups in community settings, youth groups, charities and educational institutions. The feedback identified a strong support for many of the service's proposed

workstreams and projects relating to the five principles namely; people, prevention, protection, environment and emergency response.

- NWFRS staff have been actively participating in the North Wales Public Sector Equality Network and All Wales EDI Group which meet bi-monthly and quarterly respectively. These forums help to share best practice and resources and collaborate on organising training, events and other engagement related activities. Strategic planning, develop new equality action plans and recruitment into the public sector have been a key focus for all public sector organisations during 2023/24.



- During 2023/24, representatives from the Service attended the North Wales Interfaith Forum. This forum enables the Service to connect with religious and humanistic groups to communicate our proposed plans, key safety messages and this dialogue often involves receiving feedback. Reaching out to people who celebrate and observe religion also enables our Service to promote key fire safety information relating to preparing and cooking foods, lighting bonfires, lanterns, candles and oil burners surrounding religious events, festivals and observances.



- Staff from the Service's Firepride Staff Network have actively attended pride events across North Wales throughout 2023/24 including Pride Cymru's partnership event (January 2023), Colwyn Bay Pride (May 2023) and North Wales Pride in Caernarfon (June 2023). This engagement has enabled the Service to connect with LGBT+ communities,

communicate key information, but more importantly, consult and capture feedback from one of the most disadvantaged groups of people in our society.



- Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Stewart Forshaw and Firepride Chair, Jamie Lewis received the Pride Cymru award for Outstanding Contribution by a public service in February 2024. The award recognises the service's commitment to LGBT+ inclusion both as an employer and service provider.
- Representatives from our Service attend various external forums and networks to ensure regular feedback is captured from equality interest groups. This feedback informs our initial design and service delivery. External engagement includes attending voluntary, community and public sector forums, disability and dementia support groups.

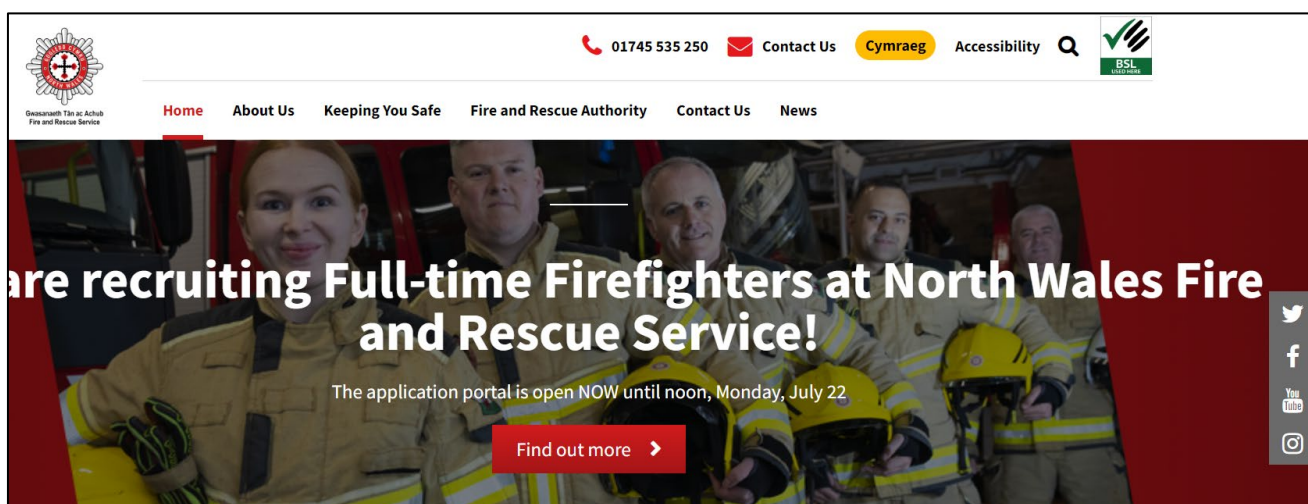


- In collaboration with road safety partners and other Fire and Rescue Services in Wales, our Service delivers a road safety intervention called 'Olivia's Story' which involves a real-life story of a young person who lost her life in a road traffic collision. The road safety provision aims to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on the road, and in particular, young drivers. North Wales Police deliver Oliver's Story to all secondary schools

and our Service deliver across further education colleges, and to apprentices in workplaces, such as Airbus. In 2023/24, over 1,000 young people have received this intervention.



- Increased engagement with ethnic minority groups across North Wales have enhanced our ability to reach seldom heard people. By actively attending community-based events organised by ethnic minority groups and other equality interest groups goes some way to develop a rapport with people that often don't often have a voice. Representatives from our Service attended several religious events and other multicultural events during 2023/24. These events enable staff to engage with people from an African, Caribbean, Portuguese, Eastern European background and various other ethnic minority groups that attended.



- In 2023/24, further accessibility improvements have been made to our website and its contents to ensure we maintain the standards required and community members find information accessible. The website translates content into 79 different languages and British Sign Language (BSL) videos have been updated to promote specific information relating to our prevention services. Our staff have received website accessibility training to ensure that we maintain standards going forward.
- In accordance with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, our annual Gender Pay Gap (GPG) report and employment information is published in respect of



employees and applicants between 1st April and 31st March each financial year. GPG reports are readily available on the service's website.



Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub  
Fire and Rescue Service



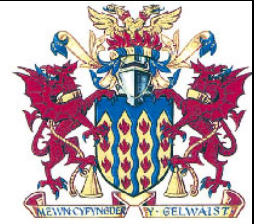
To promote equality of access and inclusion, please contact us if you require this report in large print, alternative language or format.

**Telephone** - 01745 535 250

**Text Message** – 07507 303678

**Email** - [enquiries@northwalesfire.gov.wales](mailto:enquiries@northwalesfire.gov.wales)

Report to	<b>North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority</b>
Date	<b>20 January 2025</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Stuart Millington, Assistant Chief Fire Officer</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Tim Christensen Environment and Climate Change Manager</b>
Subject	<b>Power Decarbonisation Plan</b>



## PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 This report sets out the details of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service's (the Service) Power Decarbonisation Plan (the Plan), which provides detailed measures and timescales to mitigate the carbon emissions arising from the electricity consumption of the Service's fleet and estate for the period up to 2030.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 Under Welsh law, the Service is required to mitigate its operational carbon footprint by 2030. The Plan addresses the emissions from electricity consumed by the Service's estate and vehicle fleet, with a detailed plan to eliminate these emissions as required under our Environmental Strategy.
- 3 The Plan proposes installation of solar photovoltaic arrays at all Service sites where power demand is sufficient to warrant them. This is to be funded by external borrowing on preferential terms from Salix Finance Ltd. (a body set up by central government to fund self-funding efficiency measures in public buildings), and will be repaid from savings achieved on a cost-neutral basis, yielding positive financial return once the capital cost has been repaid.
- 4 Other energy efficiency measures may be undertaken to sites under the same scheme of works (such as LED lighting upgrades) where the overall package meets the cost neutrality criteria required by Salix Finance. The Plan also sets out the Service's aims around procurement of low carbon electricity where commercially viable to do so.

## RECOMMENDATION

- 5 **It is recommended that Members:**
  - i) **Approve the Power Decarbonisation Plan.**

## **OBSERVATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE**

6 This paper has not previously been considered.

### **BACKGROUND**

7 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 requires Welsh Government to enact a series of carbon budgets, setting out a path for Wales as a nation to be carbon neutral by 2050. Under Carbon Budget 2, the Welsh public sector is required to have reached this goal by 2030.

8 To comply with this ambition, the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) adopted an Environmental Strategy on 17 July 2023 covering the period 2023-2030. Among other targets, this Strategy mandated the development of a Power Decarbonisation Plan, setting out how we would mitigate the Scope 2 (indirect) carbon emissions arising from the consumption of electricity.

9 A Members Working Group was convened between April and July 2023 to provide Members with relevant information and to obtain strategic direction for the development of detailed decarbonisation plans. This group endorsed the power decarbonisation strategy set out in this report.

### **INFORMATION**

10 The Plan sets out a series of measures the Service may employ to reduce the carbon footprint of its electricity consumption. This includes micro-generation (with a preference for solar photovoltaic), energy efficiency improvements to the fabric of our estate, and measures around the procurement of green energy delivered via the National Grid.

11 We intend to enact the Plan in tandem with the Heating Decarbonisation Plan (approved by the Authority on 21 October 2024). Where sites have heating systems replaced with low-carbon alternatives, we will aim to install solar photovoltaic arrays, battery systems, and carry out efficiency retrofits to building fabric. These schemes will be funded via Salix Finance, with cost savings modelled beforehand to ensure the schemes are cashflow neutral or positive.

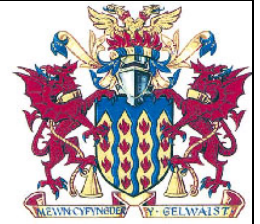
12 Although the Service plans to generate a significant amount of its own renewable energy, the Plan relies on decarbonisation of the National Grid to fully mitigate Scope 2 carbon emissions. Current central government policy is to have <1% hydrocarbon-derived electricity on the grid by 2035, therefore it is anticipated that there will remain some residual Scope 2 carbon emissions by the target date of 2030.

- 13 Mitigating this small residual carbon footprint would be disproportionately difficult and expensive, and has not been recommended to Members at this time as it is believed that the resources required are better utilised in mitigating the Service's Scope 1 (direct) emissions instead.
- 14 Structural surveys of the roofs of all Service-owned buildings have recently been undertaken, to identify suitable locations for solar arrays.

## IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The proposed Plan aligns with the Authority's stated Well-being Objectives.
Budget	Proposed retrofits are to be funded by external borrowing, with repayments fully offset by improved efficiency. The Plan is anticipated to be cashflow neutral initially, and positive within eight years.
Legal	Risk of non-compliance with Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Environment (Wales) Act 2016.
Staffing	No changes to staffing levels are anticipated as a result of this Plan
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	EDI Manager consulted through the development of this Plan, no issues raised.
Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fluctuations in energy markets can directly affect the business case for renewable energy installations. Proposals will be set out based on electricity prices at the time; however solar arrays will ultimately end up profitable regardless.</li> <li>• Battery storage systems may present a slightly increased risk of fire. The Service will take all reasonable measures to mitigate this through procurement, regular inspection and careful location of installations. Insurers will be notified to ensure continuity of cover.</li> </ul>

Report to	<b>North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority</b>
Date	<b>20 January 2025</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Stuart Millington, Assistant Chief Fire Officer</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Tim Christensen Environment and Climate Change Manager</b>
Subject	<b>Residual Carbon Emissions Plan</b>



## PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 This report sets out the details of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service's (the Service) Residual Carbon Emissions Plan (the Plan), which provides detailed measures and timescales to mitigate those carbon emissions which have not been mitigated by the Decarbonisation Plans in place for Fleet, Heating and Power for the period up to 2030.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 Under Welsh law, the Service is required to mitigate its operational carbon footprint by 2030. The Plan addresses the emissions remaining beyond the mitigation measures already adopted for Scopes 1 and 2, with a detailed plan to eliminate these emissions as required under the Service's Environmental Strategy.
- 3 The Plan proposes detailed measures to offset all residual carbon emissions from Scopes 1, 2 and 3 which cannot be directly mitigated. These residual emissions make up just over half of our total carbon footprint.
- 4 The most cost-effective means to achieve this is to sequester atmospheric carbon dioxide in trees. However, there are notable environmental risks from such schemes as well as concerns over land use, and 'additionality' – whether or not a carbon reducing activity would otherwise have taken place.
- 5 For these reasons, and the estimated capital costs of establishing a sequestration scheme, we recommend that no offsetting activity is considered until all Scope 1 and 2 emissions have been fully mitigated.

## RECOMMENDATION

- 6 **It is recommended that Members:**
- i) **Approve the Residual Carbon Emissions Plan; and**
  - ii) **direct the Environment and Climate Change Manager to begin implementing the Plan only once all carbon emissions arising under Scopes 1 and 2 have been fully mitigated.**

## OBSERVATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 7 This paper has not previously been considered.

## BACKGROUND

- 8 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 requires Welsh Government to enact a series of carbon budgets, setting out a path for Wales as a nation to be carbon neutral by 2050. Under Carbon Budget 2, the Welsh public sector is required to have reached this goal by 2030.
- 9 To comply with this ambition, the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) adopted an Environmental Strategy on 17 July 2023 covering the period 2023-2030. Among other targets, this Strategy mandated the development of a Residual Carbon Emissions Plan, setting out how we would offset emissions from all three Scopes which could not be directly mitigated.
- 10 A Members Working Group was convened between April and July 2023 to provide Members with relevant information and to obtain strategic direction for the development of detailed decarbonisation plans. This group endorsed the strategy set out in this report.

## INFORMATION

- 11 Carbon emissions can be dealt with in two ways, 'mitigation' – preventing emissions from occurring in the first place, and 'offsetting', removing an equivalent amount of atmospheric carbon dioxide (or other greenhouse gas) through an activity which would not otherwise have taken place. Mitigation is strongly preferred, which is why we have detailed plans in place to mitigate the carbon emitted by our buildings, fleet and power consumption.
- 12 To offset the remaining carbon emissions, one of the technical measures set out in the Plan would need to be enacted. The costs of many of these measures are likely to be prohibitive, which is why many other organisations have turned to tree planting (biogenic sequestration) to offset this part of their carbon footprints.

- 13 Initial discussions took place with the Woodland Trust in 2023, about the possibility of the Service funding an accredited tree planting scheme on their land, and taking ownership of the carbon sequestration rights. Due to the fact that trees do not reach peak absorption capacity (in kilograms of CO<sub>2</sub> per tree per year) for many years after planting, the number of trees required to be planted today to mitigate all our expected residual emissions by 2030 would cost in excess of one million pounds.
- 14 Although we are legally required to have a plan addressing our residual carbon emissions, Members are advised against enacting it until such time as all Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions have been addressed, as to do so would represent a poor use of money and arguably create worse environmental outcomes.

## IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The proposed Plan aligns with the Authority's stated Well-being Objectives.
Budget	The capital cost to fully mitigate our residual carbon emissions is likely to exceed £1m. Therefore, a direction from the Authority is requested for the Plan not to be enacted until all Scope 1 and 2 emissions have been mitigated in full.
Legal	Risk of non-compliance with Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Environment (Wales) Act 2016.
Staffing	No changes to staffing levels are anticipated as a result of this Plan
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	EDI Manager consulted through the development of this Plan, no issues raised.
Risks	Poorly-chosen offsetting measures can have detrimental environmental impacts, as well as being poor value for money - exposing the FRA and the Service to audit issues and reputational damage.