



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

Annual Improvement Report

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Issued: April 2013

Document reference: 210A2013



About the Auditor General for Wales

The Auditor General is independent of government and is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. He leads the Wales Audit Office and is held accountable by the Public Accounts Committee of the National Assembly for the Wales Audit Office's work.

The Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Assembly Commission and National Health Service bodies in Wales. He also appoints the external auditors of Welsh local government bodies, including unitary authorities, police, probation, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and community councils. The Auditor General's appointed auditors are responsible for the annual audit of the nearly £5.5 billion of funding that is passed by the Welsh Government to local government in the form of general and specific grants. Local government, in turn, raises a further £2.1 billion through council tax and business rates.

As well as carrying out financial audit, the Auditor General's role is to examine how public bodies manage and spend public money, including achieving value in the delivery of public services. The Wales Audit Office aims to make public money count, by promoting improvement, so that people in Wales benefit from accountable, well-managed public services that offer the best possible value for money. It is also committed to identifying and spreading good practice across the Welsh public sector.

This Annual Improvement Report has been prepared on behalf of the Auditor General for Wales by Lisa Williams and Ron Price under the direction of Jane Holownia.

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Summary report

- 1 Each year, the Auditor General must report on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement and delivering their services. Drawing on the work of the relevant Welsh inspectorates, as well as work undertaken by the Wales Audit Office, this report presents a picture of improvement over the last year. The report covers North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's (the Authority) delivery and evaluation of services in relation to 2011-12 and its planning of improvement for 2012-13.
 - fewer road traffic collisions were attended, casualties decreased and fewer young drivers were involved in accidents, although the number of fatal and serious accidents and fatalities increased.
- 2 Overall, the Auditor General has concluded that the Authority is managing its improvement programme well, but does not do enough to compare its performance to other, similar bodies.
- 3 We found that the Authority is making progress in delivering improvement in its core functions. We came to this conclusion because:
 - there were fewer dwelling fires attended than the previous year, and the number of fatalities and injuries decreased;
 - there were fewer non-domestic premises fires attended than the previous year, no fatalities and the number of injuries decreased;
 - there were fewer deliberate fires attended during 2011-12 than the previous year, no fatalities and the number of injuries decreased; and
- 4 We also found that the Authority's evaluation and reporting of its performance is balanced, but it does not do enough to compare its performance to other, similar bodies. We came to this conclusion because the Authority:
 - produced a more balanced view of its performance in 2011-12 than in previous years;
 - took positive steps to publicise the availability of its Assessment of Performance; and
 - used a wide range of relevant information to arrive at its conclusions but does not do enough to compare its performance to other, similar bodies.
- 5 Finally, we concluded that the Authority is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2012-13. We came to this conclusion because:
 - business planning arrangements are well-embedded, provide a clear picture of planned actions and are generally outcome-focused;
 - the Authority continues to manage its financial challenges effectively;

- good progress is being made to address the proposals for improvement identified in our previous assessments;
- although there are some weaknesses in approach, the Authority is continuing to improve its approach to public engagement; and
- governance arrangements have been effectively reviewed as part of the Authority's Annual Governance Statement process.

Recommendations

- 6 There are no formal recommendations made in this report.

Detailed report

Introduction

- 7 Under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure), the Auditor General must report each year on how well Welsh councils, fire and rescue authorities, and national parks are planning for improvement and delivering their services. [Appendix 1](#) provides more information about the Auditor General's powers and duties under the Measure. With help from Welsh inspectorates, including the Fire and Rescue Peer Assessment Team¹, we have brought together a picture of what each authority in Wales is trying to achieve and how it is going about it. This report also sets out the progress the Authority has made since the Auditor General published his last annual improvement report, drawing on the Authority's own self-assessment.
- 8 We do not undertake a comprehensive annual review of all the Authority's arrangements or services. The conclusions in this report are based on our cumulative and shared knowledge and the findings of prioritised work undertaken this year.
- 9 Given the wide range of services provided and the challenges facing the Authority, it would be unusual if we did not find things that can be improved. The Auditor General is able to:
- recommend to Ministers of the Welsh Government that they intervene in some way;
 - conduct a special inspection and publish the report with detailed recommendations;
 - make formal recommendations for improvement – if a formal recommendation is made, the Authority must respond to that recommendation publicly within 30 days; and
 - make proposals for improvement – if we make proposals to the Authority, we would expect them to do something about them and we will follow up what happens.
- 10 We want to find out if this report gives you the information you need and whether it is easy to understand. You can let us know your views by e-mailing us at info@wao.gov.uk or writing to us at 24, Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9LJ.

¹ The Welsh Assembly Government introduced arrangements for the assessment of fire and rescue authorities' operational performance in November 2006. The assessment process involves carrying out a self-assessment against a centrally provided framework combined with a review by a peer assessment team comprising officers from other fire and rescue authorities.

The Authority is managing its improvement programme well, but does not do enough to compare its performance to other, similar bodies

The Authority is making progress in delivering improvement in its core functions

11 Below we have provided a summary of the Authority's performance in four key areas (dwelling fires, non-domestic premises fires, deliberate fire setting and road traffic accidents). These reflect the Welsh Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework and core functions or duties of fire and rescue authorities in the UK, which are:

- to promote fire safety through the provision of information, publicity and encouragement to prevent fires and deaths and injuries by fire;
- to give advice, on request, about how to prevent fires and restrict their spread in buildings and other property, and on means of escape in the event of fire;
- to make provision for protecting life and property in the event of fire;
- to make provision for rescuing and protecting people from serious harm in the event of road traffic accidents; and
- to respond to other emergencies or eventualities as required to protect people, property, or the environment.

There were fewer dwelling fires attended than the previous year, and the number of fatalities and injuries decreased

12 The total number of dwelling fires attended decreased by one per cent during 2011-12 compared with the previous year (from 535 attendances in 2010-11 to 530 in 2011-12). This is a slightly below the Welsh average of four per cent reduction for the same period:

- dwelling fires started accidentally increased by one per cent during 2011-12 compared with the previous year (from 469 in 2010-11 to 474 in 2011-12), compared with the Welsh average reduction of two per cent for the same period; and
- there were 56 dwelling fires started deliberately, a 15 per cent reduction on the previous year which is below the below the 19 per cent reduction across Wales during the same period.

13 Fewer people died in dwelling fires during 2011-12 (from ten in 2010-11 to six in 2011-12). The number of injuries sustained in dwelling fires decreased by 39 per cent (from 62 in 2010-11 to 38 in 2011-12), well above the 21 per cent decrease seen across Wales for the same period.

14 There is evidence to suggest that free smoke alarms provided as part of its home fire safety checks are reaching those at risk, in particular, of those fires attended:

- Fewer had no smoke alarm fitted (from 17 per cent in 2010-11 to 15 per cent in 2011-12), significantly better than the Welsh average of 34 per cent for 2010-11.
- Fewer where fire detection equipment actuated (from 62 per cent in 2010-11 to 61 per cent in 2011-12), but this is better than the average of 51 per cent across Wales for 2011-12.
- An increased proportion had detection equipment fitted which did not actuate, up from 22 per cent last year, to 24 per cent in 2011-12. This proportion is above the Welsh average of 16 per cent for 2011-12.

There were fewer non-domestic premises fires attended than the previous year, no fatalities and the number of injuries decreased

- 15 The number of non-domestic premises fires attended decreased by six per cent during 2011-12 compared with the previous year (from 229 attendances in 2010-11 to 215 in 2011-12) which is below the Welsh average of 17 per cent reduction for the same period.
- 16 No people died in non-domestic premises fires during 2011-12 (the same as in 2010-11) in line with the position across Wales. The number of injuries sustained in such fires decreased from 15 in 2010-11 to three in 2011-12, a decrease of 80 per cent), which is better than the Welsh average decrease of 42 per cent for the same period.

These numbers are small and each incident can have a significant impact on the year on year comparison.

- 17 The Authority is required to enforce the provisions of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 to ensure that adequate fire safety measures are in place in commercial properties and businesses. They can also provide advice and take enforcement action when considered necessary, for example, if a serious risk exists and is not being managed. During the Autumn 2012, the Peer Assessment Team (PAT) reviewed Business Fire Safety and found that the Authority:
- had systems in place for collecting and analysing data to prioritise risk to target activities and resources;
 - used the RMS Management Information System (MIS) to store and manage risk information, and successfully used the MIS as a single repository for risk information;
 - recognised limitations in the data set in terms of unrecorded premises and had taken steps to address this with a five year data cleansing project;
 - recognised the benefits from a structure that uses County Command-based Business Fire Safety departments supported by a central Business Fire safety department, including maximising resources by having the flexibilities to manage priorities locally;

- demonstrated clear engagement with internal stakeholders when planning activities;
- provided strong evidence of effective two way information flow through the exchange of risk-critical operational intelligence with stakeholders; and
- recognised that measures of success were not communicated to citizens outside of standard statistical information provided through the Authority's website.

There were fewer deliberate fires attended during 2011-12 than the previous year, no fatalities and the number of injuries decreased

- 18 The number of deliberate fires attended decreased by five per cent during 2011-12 compared with the previous year (from 1,438 attendances in 2010-11 to 1,370 in 2011-12) which is lower than the Welsh average decrease of 25 per cent for the same period.
- 19 Some 43 per cent of all fires attended were started deliberately during 2011-12, which is slightly lower than in 2010-11 (44 per cent) and significantly lower than the Welsh average of 65 per cent during 2011-12.
- 20 The number of injuries sustained in deliberate fires decreased by 27 per cent from 11 in 2010-11 to 8 in 2011 12 which is significantly better than the Welsh average decrease of three per cent for the same period. No one died in deliberate fires during 2011-12 (same as the previous year).

Fewer road traffic collisions were attended, casualties decreased and fewer young drivers were involved in accidents but the number of fatal and serious accidents and fatalities increased

- 21 Road safety is not a statutory duty for the Authority but it works in collaboration with the police and others to improve safety on the roads through the Road Safety Wales Group. The Authority undertook many initiatives designed to decrease the number of road accidents including:
- maintaining its partner role with the Road Safety Wales group;
 - the Pass Plus Cymru driving scheme which is aimed at young drivers aged 18 to 25;
 - the Motor Education Scheme is a partnership initiative involving police and local authorities; and
 - impact roadshow displays and participating in multi-agency road safety days.
- 22 There have been improvements regarding road safety within North Wales and the pattern of performance is similar to the Welsh average. Motorcycle casualties increased compared with the previous year and remain a concern:
- the number of road traffic collisions attended has decreased by 20 per cent during 2010-11 from 767 to 617; this is significantly better than the seven per cent decrease across Wales in the same period;

- fatal and serious accidents have increased by 18 per cent between 2010 when 276 accidents occurred and 2011 when 326 accidents occurred; this increase is greater than the increase seen across Wales, which was 14 per cent;
- the number of people who died in road traffic collisions increased from 20 in 2010 to 33 in 2011;
- the number of casualties decreased by seven per cent between 2010 when there were 2,470 casualties and 2011 when there were 2,297, which is slightly better than the six per cent decrease across Wales;
- six hundred and fifty-eight drivers aged 25 and under were involved in accidents in 2010 compared with 586 in 2011 – a decrease of 11 per cent which is better than the Welsh average decrease of four per cent for the same period; and
- there were 196 motorcyclist casualties in 2010 compared with 172 in 2011 – a reduction of 12 per cent, which is significantly different from the Welsh average which showed an increase of approximately one per cent.

The Authority's evaluation and reporting of its performance is balanced, but does not do enough to compare its performance to other, similar bodies

The Authority produced a more balanced view of its performance in 2011-12 than in previous years

23 In January 2013 we reported that the Authority discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure and acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance. In our Annual Improvement Assessment Report in January 2012 we concluded that the Authority has put good arrangements in place to deliver improvement and does well in the areas it focuses on; but planning, evaluation and reporting of performance is not sufficiently balanced or outcome-based. We specifically noted that the Authority's Improvement Plan published in October 2011 provides an overall assessment of the Authority's progress against its Improvement Objectives, and shows performance for the previous years and some comparisons with other organisations are made throughout the document to give an illustration of the progress made. However, the plan:

- lacked a critical appraisal of how the Authority thinks it has done overall and what it is going to do differently as a result; and
- some of the assessments are short and tend to focus of the positive, and this means citizens may find it difficult to come to an accurate conclusion of the Authority's progress in 2010-11 from reading the plan.

24 The Authority's 'Assessment of the Authority's Performance' published in 2012 demonstrated a better level of self-awareness than the previous year and provided a more balanced account of its performance, accounting for its failures to perform, as well as promoting its successes. The report describes performance against each of its 10 Improvement Objectives and includes commentary about ongoing challenges and what the Authority intends to do to address them. There are clear and unequivocal statements for each Improvement Objective which give the Authority's view on whether it has or has not been fully achieved.

25 It is pleasing to note that the Authority has recognised previous shortcoming, and although the narrative is long in places, the Authority's 'Assessment of the Authority's Performance' report is easy to read and understand, with good explanations of 'technical' language associated with the fire and rescue sector (including a glossary as a separate section). Further refinements to cross-referencing and signposting would clarify links between the 'measures of success' performance indicators and the narrative, and assist the reader 'through' the document.

26 Performance review is a routine and regular function throughout the organisation, involving managers and members in the assessment and management of performance. Performance results are analysed with the information used to identify actions to address areas of weaknesses and future challenges.

The preparation of the Assessment of Performance also provides a focus for the Authority to challenge itself, to learn and reflect on its performance, and report on its progress to the public.

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

- 27 The Authority's 'Assessment of the Authority's Performance' report is available in electronic format and it was made available for public scrutiny by promoting its availability through direct email communication to stakeholders and ensuring it is readily available on the Authority's website (but not on the home page). Copies are available on request from Service Headquarters but reliance on this electronic format may be an issue for some people. Social media, such as Twitter, is used to promote the Assessment of Performance and enable feedback from the public.
- 28 The Authority has produced a separate Performance Summary which is clear, easy to understand, reflects progress against the 10 Improvement Objectives and accurately reflects the full Assessment of Performance report. It shows actions completed and the impact of those actions in terms of outcomes for the public, in a concise way that we consider good practice. The Authority distributed this widely by placing copies in public libraries and council information points, as well as distribution at events (agricultural shows, eisteddfodau, etc) and on the Authority's website.

The Authority used a wide range of relevant information to arrive at its conclusions but does not do enough to compare its performance to other, similar bodies

- 29 The Performance Indicator audit for 2011-12 found the Authority has reliable systems for making sure the performance indicators it uses in its reports are accurate. The Authority addressed the issues raised during our 2010-11 Performance Indicator Audit and now includes all relevant data held within the Incident Recording System about 'over-the-border' incidents in its final statistics.
- 30 The Authority provided a wide range of evidence to arrive at its conclusions and make valid assessments of performance but does not provide a comparison against its targets for the year. There is no comparison against other Welsh improvement authorities and public bodies (including Welsh fire and rescue authorities) and no comparison with UK-wide fire and rescue authorities (although the Combined Improvement Risk Reduction Plan 2010-11 to 2012-13 available on the Authority's website does contain some comparative data). There is no use of satisfaction or citizens survey information to clarify the views of the wider community in the assessment. The Welsh Government in its Performance Indicator Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities also suggests that the following (mainly local) measures which are currently not reported should be included in the Authority's Assessment of Performance:

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

The Authority is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2012-13

Business planning arrangements are well-embedded, provide a clear picture of planned actions and are generally outcome-focused

- 31 The Authority's leadership is continuing to drive change. Following local government elections in 2012, there was a significant change to the membership of the Authority: seven members returned and 21 members were new and serving on the Authority for the first time. Consequently, various training events were undertaken to fully brief members in their new roles.
- 32 The Authority discharged its improvement planning duties under the Measure and acted in accordance with Welsh Government guidance. In October 2011, the Authority published its Combined Improvement and Risk Reduction Plan which described eight Improvement Objectives for 2012-13. In July 2012 the Executive Panel reviewed these Improvement Objectives and decreased them from eight to two in order to provide a clear message about the Authority's priorities. The activities planned to achieve the six previously agreed improvement objectives have not been lost and are incorporated in departmental action plans (as they contribute to the Authority's general duty to improve).
- 33 The Authority are taking steps to make sure that stakeholders and the public are aware of the restated improvement objectives and are updating the electronic version of the plans on the Authority's website.
- 34 Routine reporting of performance information does not fully and clearly identify progress to achieve improvement objectives. Progress is largely demonstrated through the use of the Welsh Government's national strategic and core indicators together with a small number of local indicators. During 2012-13 the Authority is planning to revise, from quarter 2, its reporting to members to include progress against improvement objectives and is currently considering how best to do this. This is especially true of Improvement Objective 2, which will need to be linked to existing financial reporting. We intend to follow up this element of reporting as part of our audit work during 2013-14.
- 35 The Welsh Language Commissioner works with all fire and rescue authorities in Wales to inspect and advise on the implementation of language schemes. It is the responsibility of fire and rescue authorities to provide services to the public in Welsh in accordance with the commitments in their language schemes. Every fire and rescue authority is committed to providing an annual monitoring report to the Commissioner outlining its performance in implementing the language scheme. The Commissioner analyses every monitoring report; provides a formal response and collects further information as required.
- 36 The Authority has ensured a consistent approach to promoting and raising the profile of the Welsh Language across North Wales Fire and Rescue Service by establishing the Welsh Language Forum, replacing the existing Language Working Group and the Strategic Welsh Language Group.

The Group has a strategic and practical role, and is responsible for ensuring that North Wales Fire and Rescue Service continues to work toward further progress through its Welsh Language Scheme. It is important that the Forum ensures it builds on the work of its predecessors during 2013. The Authority has continued to invest in its staff by providing training and simultaneous translation, and since January 2010, it has been a requirement for all new staff that join the Authority to reach level 2 proficiency in the Welsh language. The Authority has continued to promote fire safety inspections through the medium of Welsh, and as a result, there was a significant increase in the number of people asking for the fire inspection in Welsh during 2011-12.

The Authority continues to manage its financial challenges effectively

- 37 The Authority has a sound approach to financial management, but given the scale of change required, clear leadership is required.
- 38 The financial forecast for the three-year period to 2013-14 shows the Authority needs to deliver cumulative projected efficiencies of £2.4 million. The Authority updated the forecast as part of the preparation for setting the 2013-14 budget and we will review this as part of our 2013-14 work.
- 39 Although the Authority's approach to addressing its financial challenges has, to date, been robust and well-managed, issues remain given the likelihood of real term reductions in central funding to 2016-17

and beyond. The Authority is continuing to seek out opportunities for further efficiency savings, over and above those already identified. Part of this work will be via the recently established National Issues Committee which will consider the potential for efficiency savings and collaboration across the three Welsh fire and rescue authorities as well as with the wider public and voluntary sectors.

- 40 The auditor appointed by the Auditor General recently gave her opinion on the Authority's accounts and based on this the Appointed Auditor's view is that the financial statements were satisfactory. An unqualified opinion on the accounts was given on 27 September 2012 which was summarised in her Annual Audit Letter – [Appendix 3](#) gives more detail.

Good progress is being made to address the proposals for improvement identified in previous assessments

- 41 The Authority has made progress in implementing proposals for improvement in our Annual Improvement Report 2012.
- 42 During Autumn 2012 the Peer Assessment Team (PAT) reviewed the evidence submitted within the Authority's self-assessment in order to assess the 'direction of travel' in implementing areas for improvement identified previously. The PAT followed up the areas for development in respect of Health and Safety, Training and Development, Community Safety and Community Risk Reduction, and Call Handling and

Response. Overall PAT noted progress in each of the areas with some further planned improvements and agreed with the progress noted in the Authority's self assessments.

Although there are some weaknesses in approach, the Authority is continuing to improve its approach to public engagement

43 We reviewed the Authority's approach to public engagement and concluded that the Authority can demonstrate effective engagement at an operational level and shows a strong commitment towards increasing its public engagement activity. It now needs to develop a more co-ordinated, strategic approach to clarify the expectations and resources required to undertake and evaluate future public engagement activity.

Governance arrangements have been effectively reviewed as part of the Authority's Annual Governance Statement process

44 We considered the Authority's approach to Governance. We evaluated the effectiveness of the Authority's review of Governance, and concluded that the Authority had looked at its own Governance arrangements comprehensively and thoroughly. The review of Governance through the completion of the Annual Governance Statement was thorough and robust and had been sufficiently wide ranging. The Authority

has made use of its Code of Corporate Governance to ensure compliance with sound Governance principles. The Authority has identified areas of improvement in its Governance arrangements and made plans to address them.

45 There are four key areas where greater emphasis should be placed in reviewing the Annual Governance Statement to:

- ensure greater involvement of staff across the Authority;
- a greater emphasis on community engagement;
- ensuring adequate comparison of performance with other improvement authorities takes place; and
- increased consideration of Governance arrangements around partnerships and commissioning.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Status of this report

The Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) requires the Auditor General to undertake an annual improvement assessment, and to publish an annual improvement report, for each improvement authority in Wales. This requirement covers local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

This report has been produced by the Wales Audit Office on behalf of the Auditor General to discharge his duties under section 24 of the Measure. The report also discharges his duties under section 19 to issue a report certifying that he has carried out an improvement assessment under section 18 and stating whether, as a result of his improvement plan audit under section 17, he believes that the authority has discharged its improvement planning duties under section 15.

Improvement authorities are under a general duty to 'make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of [their] functions'. Improvement authorities are defined as local councils, national parks, and fire and rescue authorities.

The annual improvement assessment is the main piece of work that enables the Auditor General to fulfil his duties. The improvement assessment is informed by a forward-looking assessment of an authority's likelihood to comply with its duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement. It also includes a retrospective assessment of whether an authority has achieved its planned improvements in order to inform a view as to the authority's track record of improvement. This report also summarises the Auditor General's conclusions on the authority's self-assessment of its performance.

The Auditor General may also in some circumstances carry out special inspections (under section 21), which will be reported to the relevant authorities and Ministers, and which he may publish (under section 22). This published Annual Improvement Report summarises audit and assessment reports including any special inspections (under section 24).

An important ancillary activity for the Wales Audit Office is the co-ordination of assessment and regulatory work (required by section 23), which takes into consideration the overall programme of work of all relevant regulators at an improvement authority. The Auditor General may also take account of information shared by relevant regulators (under section 33) in his assessments.

Appendix 2

Useful information about North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

The Authority

The Authority has to perform all the duties and responsibilities in accordance with appropriate legislation and regulations. There are three important pieces of law relating to fire authorities:

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004

The Act requires all fire authorities to make provision for fire fighting, which means not only putting out fires but also protecting life and property in case of fire. It also makes provision for attending road traffic collisions and other emergencies as well as community safety activities.

The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order (FSO) 2005

The Order came into force on 1 October 2006, and replaced over 70 separate pieces of fire safety legislation. The requirement for businesses to have fire certificates was abolished. The FSO applies to all non-domestic premises in England and Wales, including the common parts of blocks of flats and houses in multiple occupation. It gives responsibility to those who are best placed to address fire safety and ensure that risks are kept under review. Under the Order the Responsible Person² is required to carry out a fire risk assessment and put in place appropriate fire safety measures to minimise the risk to life from fire; and to keep the assessment up to date. The Order is enforced by Fire and Rescue Authorities who are expected to develop appropriate risk based inspection regimes.

Civil Contingencies Act 2004

The Act delivers a single framework for civil protection in the United Kingdom capable of meeting the challenges of the twenty-first century. The Act is divided into two parts; Part 1 which defines the obligations of certain organisations to prepare for various types of emergencies and Part 2 which provides additional powers for the Government to use in the event of a large scale emergency. Under the Act fire and rescue services are defined as Category 1 Responders and as such have six specific duties to deliver:

- assess the risk of emergencies occurring and use this to inform contingency planning;
- put in place emergency plans;
- put in place Business Continuity Management arrangements;
- put in place arrangements to make information available to the public about civil protection matters and maintain arrangements to warn, inform and advise the public in the event of an emergency;

² Communities and Local Government Fire Safety Law and Guidance documents for business states that the law applies if you are: responsible for business premises, an employer or self-employed with business premises, responsible for a part of a dwelling where that part is solely used for business purposes, a charity or voluntary organisation, a contractor with a degree of control over any premises, providing accommodation for paying guests.

- share information with other local responders to enhance co-ordination; and
- co-operate with other local responders to enhance co-ordination and efficiency.

There is an additional duty placed on local authorities to:

- Provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations about business continuity management. Local fire and rescue services can be called upon to assist in this role.

Category 2 organisations include organisations such as the Health and Safety Executive, transport and utility companies. Category 1 and 2 organisations form Local Resilience Forums (which are co-terminus with police areas) which will help co-ordination and co-operation between responders at the local level.

The Authority is funded directly by its constituent local authorities based on the population forecasts in each area. It comprises 28 councillors from the six unitary authorities of North Wales (the number of representatives from each constituent authority is determined by the number of registered local government electors in each area).

The Authority spends approximately £31 million per year (2011-12). In the same year the Authority also spent £4.49 million in capital items. This equates to about £45 per resident.

The current Chairman of the Fire and Rescue Authority is Councillor Aled Morris Jones.

Meetings of the full Authority normally take place four times every year – in March, June, October and December to consider such topics as service plans, routine business matters, budgets and spending, and to take or approve policy decisions as appropriate. Meetings are open to the public, and records of the Authority's transactions are available from the Authority's website.

The Service is led and managed by Simon Smith, Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive supported by the principal officer team, the senior management team and specialist advisors.

For more information see the Authority's own website at www.northwales-fire.gov.uk or contact the Authority at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Ffordd Salesbury, St. Asaph Business Park, St. Asaph, Denbighshire, LL17 0JJ.

Appendix 3

Appointed Auditor's Annual Audit Letter

Simon Smith
Chief Fire Officer
North Wales Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
Ffordd Salesbury
St Asaph, Denbighshire
LL17 OJJ

Dear Simon

Annual Audit Letter

This letter summarises the key messages arising from my statutory responsibilities under the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 as the Appointed Auditor and my reporting responsibilities under the Code of Audit Practice.

The Authority complied with its responsibilities relating to financial reporting and use of resources

It is the Authority's responsibility to:

- put systems of internal control in place to ensure the regularity and lawfulness of transactions and to ensure that its assets are secure;
- maintain proper accounting records;
- prepare a Statement of Accounts in accordance with relevant requirements; and
- establish and keep under review appropriate arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

The Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 requires me to:

- provide an audit opinion on the accounting statements;
- review the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources; and
- issue a certificate confirming that I have completed the audit of the accounts.

Local authorities in Wales prepare their accounting statements in accordance with the requirements of the CIPFA/LASAAC Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the United Kingdom. This Code is based on International Financial Reporting Standards. On 27 September 2012 I issued an unqualified audit opinion on the accounting statements confirming that they present a true and fair view of the Authority's and the Pension Fund's financial position and transactions. My report is contained within the Statement of Accounts. The key matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to members of the Audit Committee in my Audit of Financial Statements report on the 24 September 2012.

My consideration of the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness has been based on the audit work undertaken on the accounts as well as placing reliance on the work completed to date as part of the Improvement Assessment under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009. Overall, I am satisfied that the Authority has appropriate arrangements in place. The Auditor General will highlight areas where the effectiveness of these arrangements has yet to be demonstrated or where improvements could be made when he publishes his Annual Improvement Report.

I issued a certificate confirming that the audit of the accounts has been completed on 27 September 2012.

The financial audit fee for 2011-12 is currently expected to be in line with the agreed fee set out in the Annual Audit Outline.

Yours sincerely

Virginia Stevens
For and on Behalf of the Appointed Auditor
cc. Dawn Docx, Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Appendix 4

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's improvement objectives and self-assessment

The Authority's improvement objectives

The Authority is required by the Welsh Government to make plans to improve its functions and the services it provides. Each year it must publish these plans along with specific 'improvement objectives' that set out the key things that the Authority intends to do to improve. The Authority must do this as soon as reasonably practicable after 31 December of the year prior to the financial year to which the plan relates (the policy intention is that Fire and Rescue Authorities will publish between 1 January and 31 March).

The Authority published its improvement objectives for 2011-12 and 2012-13 on the Authority's website at www.northwales-fire.gov.uk. They are:

Improvement Objectives 2011-12	Improvement Objectives 2012-13
<p>Improvement Objective 1 To help keep people and communities safe by preventing fatalities and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation</p>	<p>Improvement Objective 1 To help keep people and communities safe by preventing fatalities and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation</p>
<p>1 Delivery of Community safety/Risk Reduction Strategy that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• provision of community safety advice;• targeted and tailored delivery of home fire safety checks; and• provision of free equipment according to assessed need.	<p>1 Delivery of Community safety/Risk Reduction Strategy that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• provision of community safety advice;• targeted and tailored delivery of home fire safety checks; and• provision of free equipment according to assessed need.
<p>2 Peer assessment of the Community Safety strategy.</p>	<p>2 Peer assessment of the Community Safety strategy.</p>
<p>3 Continuous monitoring of the incidence of dwelling fires.</p>	<p>3 Continuous monitoring of the incidence of dwelling fires.</p>
<p>4 Involvement of partner organisations in learning lessons from the dwelling fires to decrease likelihood of recurrence.</p>	<p>4 Involvement of partner organisations in learning lessons from the dwelling fires to decrease likelihood of recurrence.</p>
<p>5 Use of information to predict and prevent dwelling fires.</p>	<p>5 Use of information to predict and prevent dwelling fires.</p>
<p>6 Development of local attendance standard to support fast and accurate response to dwelling fires.</p>	<p>6 Development of local attendance standard to support fast and accurate response to dwelling fires.</p>

Improvement Objectives 2011-12
7 Improve availability of retained duty system (RDS) fire stations through more efficient management of recruitment processes.
<p>Improvement Objective 2</p> <p>To help minimise the risk of fires starting accidentally in non-domestic properties, so that normal activities can continue and the lives of people visiting and working there are not put at risk</p>
1 Continued development of targeted programme of inspections of fire safety arrangements in non-domestic properties using local intelligence and information held on the Records Management system.
2 Fast and accurate response to fires in non-domestic premises by fire crews equipped with information on mobile data terminals linked to centrally held hazard records and other intelligence.
<p>Improvement Objective 3</p> <p>To help minimise the danger and damage caused by non-fire emergencies, such as flooding, road traffic collisions, and chemical incidents</p>
1 Continued interagency working (e.g. with the Environment Agency) and active participation in the Local Resilience Forum.
2 Continued participation in schemes designed to increase road safety, such as Pass Plus Wales, the Motor Education Scheme and Impact Roadshows.
3 Development of a method of profiling RTC incidents in North Wales to support and enhance the strategy for mitigating their effects.
4 Development of, and baseline measurement against, local performance indicators to support improvement in this area.

Improvement Objectives 2012-13
7 Improve availability of retained duty system (RDS) fire stations through more efficient management of recruitment processes.
<p>Improvement Objective 2</p> <p>To find ways of reducing the overall cost of running the service each year in order to operate with an annual budget of £32 million until 2013-14</p>

Improvement Objectives 2011-12

- 5 Continued increase in accurate records of hazardous materials held on premises.

Improvement Objective 4

To help to tackle problems of deliberate fire-setting so that people, communities, businesses, the environment and the area's heritage are not put at risk

- 1 Collaboration with North Wales Police and other public and voluntary agencies to prevent arson and acts of vandalism by fire.
- 2 Working closely with particular groups and individuals (e.g. through the Phoenix and FACE schemes) to influence behaviour away from deliberate fire-setting.

Improvement Objective 5

To focus on improving the sustainable development of the Authority by finding the right balance between the environmental, economic and social impact of providing a fire and rescue service

- 1 Roll-out of Sustainable Development Action Plan.

Improvement Objective 6

To become better at identifying and engaging with people who could find themselves socially and/or economically disadvantaged, so that we can enhance their sense of wellbeing and decrease the level of risk to their personal safety

- 1 Drawing together a range of population-based information from reliable sources to support efficient and effective targeting of safety advice.
- 2 Development of a Single Equality Scheme that helps to protect people from being disadvantaged unfairly on account of their age, disability, gender, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy, race, religion of belief, or sexual orientation.

Improvement Objectives 2011-12

Improvement Objective 7

To ensure that the Service's business continuity planning and management arrangements are as comprehensive and secure as they can be

- 1 Reappraisal of Business Continuity Planning resources and responsibilities to promote renewed emphasis on progressing with existing plans and continuously developing new ones.
- 2 Giving equal importance to corporate and operational business continuity management to ensure that no area has been overlooked and that recovery plans are robust.

Improvement Objective 8

To change aspects of the organisation's structure and ways of operating

- 1 Implementing the officer review.
- 2 Introducing new ways of delivering the legislative fire safety function.
- 3 Investigating the feasibility of using a reserve pool of WDS personnel to cover RDS stations.
- 4 Reviewing the support staff function.
- 5 Developing a Job Design and Evaluation protocol.

Improvement Objective 9

To review and improve internal business processes

- 1 Reviewing the efficiency of a range of business systems and tying that in with a robust case-by-case assessment of posts to ensure that they continue to be aligned to service requirements.

Improvement Objectives 2011-12	
2	Re-designing the operational support and development function.
3	Re-designing the training, development and learning function.
Improvement Objective 10	
To plan and prepare for the 2012-13 budget reduction.	
1	Agreeing a plan to reduce staff costs by around £1,000,000 (e.g, self rostering/station closures/ pump removal/other option).

The Authority’s self-assessment of performance

The Authority’s self-assessment of its performance during 2011-12 can be found on the Authority’s website www.northwales-fire.gov.uk (Assessment of Performance 2011-12).

Appendix 5

Proposals for improvement 2012-13

Proposals for improvement made in 2012-13

- | | |
|----|--|
| P1 | Continue to develop corporate processes to promote public engagement, in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• to develop a more strategic, co-ordinated and planned approach to public engagement to minimise duplication of work and maximise impact and outcomes;• identify, define and prioritise what public engagement activity is essential for the Authority, its partners and the public it serves;• identify resources required and take advantage of outreach and local fire stations to encourage them to engage with their local communities; and• develop processes and structure to help prepare and deal with controversial situations and potential difficult decisions – to assess level of risk and identify mitigating actions. |
| P2 | Develop methods to use and evaluate the results of public engagement activities more widely, and inform the public how their input influenced what the Authority does. |
| P3 | Using more comparative data will help the Authority explain its achievements and future challenges. |

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