



Ein cyf/Our ref JJ/05145/24

Council Leaders  
South Wales Local Authorities

[naomi.alleyne@wlga.gov.uk](mailto:naomi.alleyne@wlga.gov.uk)

31 May 2024

Dear Council Leaders

Thank you for your letter of 11 April about the Welsh Government's decision to appoint Commissioners to oversee South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS). I welcomed the opportunity to meet most of you on 16 May to discuss the issues you raised.

As I said at that meeting your input is vital to resolving the problems in SWFRS and I look forward to working closely with you and the wider local government family to develop that solution. I committed to regular discussions with yourselves, and I expect the Commissioners to do the same.

Many of the problems within SWFRS related to misconduct and poor management by officers and I regret any sense that individual Members felt unfairly criticised by the appointment of Commissioners. Communication around that decision could have been better, and you have my commitment that it will be better in the future. I will also be writing to the Members of SWFRA who were in post at the point of intervention in similar terms.

Nonetheless, the situation also exposed problems within the current system of governance in the sector across Wales. Again, I do not think that represented failings on the part of individual Members so much as systemic weaknesses in the current model. As I said in the meeting those might include: a lack of clarity about the purpose of an FRA in relation to the FRS; too many members; an understandable imbalance of expertise between Members and officers given the technical nature of much of firefighters role; and inadequate support, training and remuneration for Members. The current financial model, relying on the levying of contributions from local authorities, lacks accountability and also needs revisiting. It would also be regrettable if appointments to FRA membership were seen as somehow less important than appointments to Council cabinets or scrutiny committee chairs.

I want to work with local government across Wales collectively to develop a new, clearer and more effective governance model within the sector. I plan to visit all local authorities in the coming months, and I also aim to participate in your regional meetings and to attend meetings of Fire and Rescue Authorities. The requirement for a new model is particularly pressing in South Wales, as it will need to be in place to support the ending of the intervention, which I expect to occur as soon as possible, and by the end of the current

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:  
0300 0604400

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay  
Caerdydd • Cardiff  
CF99 1SN

[Gohebiaeth.Julie.James@llyw.cymru](mailto:Gohebiaeth.Julie.James@llyw.cymru)  
[Correspondence.Julie.James@gov.Wales](mailto:Correspondence.Julie.James@gov.Wales)

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Senedd term at the very latest. Some form of shadow operation of the new model might well be necessary to allow for that. However I expect to apply the new approach to the other two FRAs too.

To initiate that work, when we met on 16 May I said I would welcome written observations from yourselves. Those can and should cover any matter which you feel is relevant, but it might be particularly helpful to focus on the following:

- What the overall purpose of an FRA should be (eg leadership of the Service and/or scrutiny of officers)
- The ideal number of Members of an FRA
- How those Members should be appointed (eg nominated by local authorities and/or the Welsh Ministers, and/or co-opted by the FRA)
- The support, training and remuneration that FRA Members should receive
- The internal structures that FRAs should have, eg scrutiny committees
- The accountability relationships that FRAs should have with local authorities, communities and the Welsh Government
- What the funding arrangements should be (eg levies, Welsh Government grants or council tax precepts), and how to ensure accountability for budget and spending decisions

At this very early stage I have not reached a position on any of these issues, and I offer them only to give structure to our discussions. We agreed on 16 May that the WLGA would co-ordinate responses, and I welcome any contribution you are able to make, ideally by the end of June. I will then look to arrange further individual and collective discussions with you.

I am copying this letter to other attendees at our meeting, and to the Commissioners. In light of the implications across Wales, I am also copying it to all other Leaders and to the Chairs of North Wales and Mid and West Wales FRAs.

Yours sincerely



**Julie James AS/MS**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Lywodraeth Leol, Tai a Chynllunio  
Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Local Government and Plannin