



WALES AUDIT OFFICE  
SWYDDFA ARCHWILIO CYMRU

# Annual Improvement Report

## Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

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# 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 Mid and West 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.
  - there were fewer deliberate fires attended than the previous year and the number of fatalities remains low; and
  - the number of road traffic collisions attended and the number of casualties decreased but the number of fatal and serious accidents increased.
- 2 Overall the Auditor General has concluded that the Authority is managing its improvement programme well but public reporting of performance is not as clear and comprehensive as it could be.
- 3 We found that the Authority is making progress in delivering improvement in its core functions, although the slight increase in the level of injuries sustained in fires and the number of fatal and serious road traffic accidents remain an area for future focus. We came to this conclusion because:
  - there were fewer dwelling fires attended than the previous year, and although the number of fatalities decreased, the number of people injured increased slightly compared with a decrease across Wales;
  - there were fewer non-domestic premises fires attended than the previous year and no fatalities, but injuries increased slightly compared with a decrease across Wales;
- 4 We also found that the Authority's evaluation and reporting is better than previous years, but there is scope to strengthen public reporting and make it more accessible, in line with Welsh Government guidance. We came to this conclusion because the Authority:
  - produced a more robust and balanced view of its performance in 2011-12, but fully reflecting Welsh Government guidance would strengthen improvement reporting by providing a clear view on how well the Authority feels it has achieved its objectives, explaining why information used in its self-assessment is relevant and using less technical language which some people may find difficult to understand;
  - took steps to publicise the availability of its assessment but relies heavily on the electronic format and consequently, wider access to the data may be an issue for some; and
  - used a narrow range of relevant information to arrive at its conclusions and is working to improve its ability to show the impact of its activity.

- 5 Finally, we concluded that the Authority is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2012-13, although it faces ongoing challenges in implementing its planned changes to services. We came to this conclusion because:
- business planning arrangements are much improved, provide a clearer picture of actions planned and are more outcome-focused but challenges remain in delivering these changes;
  - the Authority continues to manage its financial challenges effectively;
  - good progress is being made to address the proposals for improvement identified in 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 Team<sup>1</sup>, 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 and proposals made during the year are set out in [Appendix 5](#). 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](mailto:info@wao.gov.uk) or writing to us at 24, Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF11 9LJ.

<sup>1</sup> In November 2006 the Welsh Assembly Government launched arrangements for the assessment of fire and rescue authorities' operational performance. 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 public reporting of performance is not as clear and comprehensive as it could be

The Authority is making progress in delivering improvement in its core functions, although the slight increase in the level of injuries sustained in fires and the number of fatal and serious road traffic accidents remain an area for future focus

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) which reflect the Welsh Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework and core functions or duties of fire and rescue authorities in the UK:

- 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 although the number of fatalities decreased, the number of people injured increased slightly compared with a decrease across Wales

12 The total number of dwelling fires attended decreased by nine per cent during 2011-12 compared with the previous year (from 674 attendances in 2011-11 to 610 in 2011-12). In addition:

- dwelling fires started accidentally decreased by eight per cent during 2011-12 compared with the previous year (from 604 in 2010-11 to 555 in 2011-12), which is better than the two per cent decrease across Wales for the same period; and
- the number of dwelling fires started deliberately decreased by 21 per cent (from 70 on 2010-11 to 55 in 2011-12), which is better than the 19 per cent average decrease across Wales for the same period.

13 Three people died in dwelling fires during 2011-12 (four less than 2010-11). The number of injuries sustained in dwelling fires increased by 31 per cent during 2011-12 (from 42 in 2010-11 to 55 in 2011-12) compared with a 21 per cent decrease across Wales for the same period.



- 14 There is evidence to suggest that free smoke alarms provided as part of the Authority's Home Fire Safety Checks work are reaching those at risk, but at a slower rate than other fire and rescue authorities in Wales. Of those fires attended:
- fewer had no smoke alarm fitted (from 42 per cent in 2010-11 to 39 per cent in 2011-12), although this proportion is still higher than the Welsh average of 34 per cent for 2011-12;
  - there was an increase in the activation of fire detection equipment (from 44 per cent in 2010-11 to 48 per cent in 2011-12) although this proportion is lower than the Welsh average of 51 per cent for the same period; and
  - fewer dwellings had fire detection equipment fitted which did not activate (from 14 per cent in 2010-11 to 12 per cent in 2011-12) which is lower than the Welsh average of 16 per cent for the same period.

**There were fewer non-domestic premises fires attended than the previous year and no fatalities, but injuries increased slightly compared with a decrease across Wales**

- 15 The number of non-domestic premises fires attended decreased by 15 per cent during 2011-12 compared with the previous year (from 333 attendances in 2010-11 to 282 in 2011-12) which is lower than the Welsh average decrease of 17 per cent for the same period.

- 16 No people died in non-domestic premises fires during 2011-12 (same as in 2010-11) in line with the position across Wales. The number of injuries sustained in such fires increased from two in 2010-11 to 11 in 2011-12, compared with a 42 per cent decrease across Wales for the same period. However, 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 Autumn 2012, the Peer Assessment Team, 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 CFRMIS Management Information System (MIS) to store and manage risk information;
  - recognised limitations in the data set in terms of unrecorded premises and have taken steps to address this;
  - recognised that CFRMIS is capable of acting as a single repository for risk information, though resource limitations regarding staff with skills to develop the MIS meant that this had not been feasible to date;

- recognised the benefits of a structure that uses command-based Business Fire Safety functions supported by a central Business Fire Safety department, including maximising resources by having the flexibilities to manage priorities locally;
- provided strong evidence of effective two way information flow through the exchange of risk critical operational intelligence between Business Fire Safety and other internal stakeholders; and
- recognised that measures of success were not communicated to citizens.

**There were fewer deliberate fires attended than the previous year and the number of fatalities remains low**

- 18 The number of deliberate fires attended decreased by 26 per cent during 2011-12 compared with the previous year (from 3,278 attendances in 2010-11 to 2,426 in 2011-12) which is better than the Welsh average decrease of 25 per cent for the same period.
- 19 Fifty-four per cent of all fires attended were started deliberately during 2011-12, which is lower than 2010-11 (58 per cent) and is lower than the Welsh average of 65 per cent for the same period.

- 20 The number of injuries sustained in deliberate fires increased from two in 2010-11 to seven in 2011-12 compared with the Welsh average decrease of three per cent for the same period. However, these numbers are small and each incident can have a significant impact on the year on year comparison.
- 21 One person died in a deliberate fire during 2011-12 (the same as in 2010-11).

**The number of road traffic collisions attended and the number of casualties decreased but the number of fatal and serious accidents increased**

- 22 Road safety is not a statutory duty for the Authority but it works in collaboration with the police and others to make people more aware of the dangers on the roads and to improve safety. During 2011-12 the Authority undertook many initiatives, some with partners, designed to reduce the number of road traffic accidents including:
- Bike safe – a project to decrease deaths, injuries and accidents by motorcycle users; and
  - Motorcycle Safety, Pass Plus Cymru, Crash Scene Initiative Cymru – to provide education to target groups.

- 23 There have been some improvements regarding road safety within Mid and West Wales:
- the number of road traffic collisions attended decreased by seven per cent during 2011-12 (from 1,078 in 2010-11 to 1,007 in 2011-12), which is the same as the decrease across Wales for the same period;
  - the number of fatal and serious accidents increased by nine per cent (from 377 accidents in 2010 to 413 accidents in 2011) which is better than the 14 per cent increase across Wales for the same period;
  - the number of people who died in road traffic collisions remained broadly the same (37 in 2010 and 38 in 2011);
  - the number of casualties decreased by six per cent (from 3,550 casualties in 2010 to 3,345 casualties in 2011) which is the same as the Welsh average for the same period;
  - fewer drivers aged 25 and under were involved in accidents in 2011 than in 2010 (987 compared with 1,110), a decrease of five per cent which is better than the four per cent decrease across Wales for the same period; and
  - there were fewer motorcyclist casualties in 2011 than in 2010 (249 compared with 260 in 2010), a decrease of four per cent, which is lower than the five per cent decrease across Wales for the same period.

## The Authority's evaluation and reporting is better than previous years, but there is scope to strengthen public reporting and make it more accessible, in line with Welsh Government guidance

The Authority produced a more robust and balanced view of its performance in 2011-12, but fully reflecting Welsh Government guidance would strengthen improvement reporting by providing a clear view on how well the Authority feels it has achieved its objectives, explaining why information used in its self-assessment is relevant and using less technical language which some people may find difficult to understand

24 In our Annual Improvement Report (January 2012) we concluded that evaluation and reporting of performance was not robust, although steps were being taken to strengthen them. The Authority's assessment of its performance for 2010-11 was very brief, limited to actions undertaken within the Managing Risk theme (although all Improvement Objectives were included in this area). It did not state how well the Authority felt it had performed in 2010-11 (by theme or overall) or, if it had not performed well in any particular area, what it was going to do about it. This was partly due to the Authority's very general Improvement Objectives for 2010-11 which made it difficult to assess progress.

25 The Authority's Performance Assessment Report for 2011-12, published in October 2012, covered all its priorities for the year and demonstrated a better level of self-awareness than the previous year. It provided a more balanced account of its performance; identifying further work in some areas where not all anticipated actions were completed in the year, as well as promoting its successes.

26 Although it had made improvements, in January 2013 we reported that the Authority discharged its reporting duties under the Measure but should ensure that it acts more in accordance with Welsh Government guidance. In particular, there are elements of the Authority's Performance Assessment Report for 2011-12 which do not fully reflect Welsh Government guidance but would do so if the Authority:

- Drew out the areas of improvement more clearly. The Performance Assessment consists of various sections, five are based on key themes and include information about work completed in the year, as well as the areas of improvement. As the document also refers to 11 Strategic Objectives, some people may be confused about what the Authority is reporting against.
- Included a clear statement of how well it thinks it has achieved each of its areas of improvement (as these are the annual Improvement Objectives). The Authority has included an overall statement that it has had 'an extremely successful year' but hasn't expanded on this or provided a view on individual areas of improvement.
- Included a rationale to explain why specific measures used are appropriate to evaluate progress in each of the areas of improvement. Elements of National Strategic Indicators (NSIs), Core Indicators (CIs) and local data have been used but some are used repeatedly and in some cases the link with the area of improvement is tenuous and/or not easy to understand. Greater explanation

and expansion of the comparative data used would also assist in the reader's understanding of the performance information provided.

- Used clearer explanations that enable readers to see and understand the impact of improvements and changes made during the year. The Performance Assessment is clearly written in many places, but outcomes are not always clear; the tendency to use 'technical' language may also be confusing for some people.

27 Performance review is a routine and regular function throughout the organisation, involving managers and members in the assessment and management of performance. Performance results are analysed, with the information being used to identify actions to address areas of weaknesses and future challenges. The preparation of the Performance Assessment 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 steps to publicise the availability of its assessment but relies heavily on the electronic format and consequently, wider access to the data may be an issue for some**

28 The Authority's Performance Assessment 2011-12 was published, for the first time, in primarily electronic format to provide information in a flexible and interactive way. The Authority made it available for public scrutiny by promoting its availability through direct e-mail communication to stakeholders and ensuring it is readily available on the Authority's website (on the home page). Copies are available on request from Service Headquarters. Social media, such as Twitter, was used to promote the Performance Assessment and enable the public to feedback their views on the report.

29 The Authority has not produced a separate 'public summary' and doing so would help the public understand the overall position and can act as a means of guiding the public through the more detailed assessments for each improvement area.

**The Authority used a narrow range of relevant information to arrive at its conclusions and is working to improve its ability to show the impact of its activity**

- 30 Our audit of performance indicators found that the Authority has reliable systems for making sure the performance indicators it uses in its reports are accurate. The Authority has addressed the issues raised during our 2010-11 Performance Indicator Audit in respect of improving the timeliness and accuracy of data within the Incident Recording System, and adopting stronger year-end processes.
- 31 Our Annual Improvement Report 2012 noted that the Authority 'needs to further develop and report as appropriate performance measures, which will enable it to assess if Improvement Objectives have been achieved'. Although the Authority used some additional information, such as the number of inspections undertaken by business fire safety, skills gap data, attacks on crews and numbers of home fire safety checks undertaken this year, it continues to rely primarily on the statutory and core indicators. Including more local indicators would provide a more 'rounded' view of performance.
- 32 The Authority provided data on how well it has performed against the previous three years, but does not provide a comparison against its targets for the year (although targets for 2012-13 are noted). Whilst the Authority provides comparative data with

other Welsh fire and rescue authorities, there is no comparison against other Welsh improvement authorities and public bodies. A narrative comparison with other fire and rescue authorities in the UK is included but it is not easy to understand and has little explanation. There is no use of satisfaction or citizens survey information to clarify the views of the wider community in the assessment.

- 33 The Authority's Performance Assessment recognises that not all Core Indicators are used in the report, and signposts their availability on the Authority's website. The Welsh Government, in its Performance Indicator Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities, suggests the following (mainly local) measures which are not currently reported should be included in the Authority's assessment of performance report:
- performance in maintaining operational competence (although skills gap data is included);
  - performance against the Welsh Fire and Rescue Authority Equality and Diversity Strategy;
  - performance against the Authority's Welsh Language Scheme (although the number of Welsh speakers employed is included); and
  - information in respect of sustainability (where there is a specific improvement objective for this).

- 34 The Authority does not always fully evaluate the impact of its activity. For example, although there is a section under each theme headed 'what difference have our improvements made and how do we measure it', the narrative that follows is not focused on outcomes, and does not clearly describe what the changes described in the actions mean. This area for improvement has been recognised by the Authority, and it has been developing more outcome-focused measures to assess performance against 2012-13 priorities and in setting 2013-14 Improvement Objectives.

## The Authority is likely to comply with the requirement to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2012-13, although it faces ongoing challenges in implementing its planned changes to services

### Business planning arrangements are much improved, provide a clearer picture of actions planned and are more outcome-focused but challenges remain in delivering these changes

- 35 The Authority's leadership is continuing to implement the changes agreed in the Service Review Programme. Mechanisms to regularly monitor progress are in place and fora exist for senior managers to consider any corrective action needed if slippage occurs. However, some of the planned changes have proved difficult to implement and, although officers and members have taken difficult decisions, ongoing challenges remain, particularly in respect of crewing changes. We will continue to monitor this as part of our 2013-14 audit work.
- 36 Following local government elections in 2012, there was a significant change to the membership of the Authority: five members returned and 19 members were new and serving on the Authority for the first time. Member nomination from one council continues to be progressed. Consequently, various training events were undertaken to fully brief members in their new roles.
- 37 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 Improvement Plan for 2012-13.
- 38 The Authority provided a general explanation of why its five improvement objectives were chosen for 2012-13. Each improvement objective includes a description of how the Authority will know if they are having a positive effect. This goes some way to explaining to citizens what they can expect to see as a result of the improvement objectives through the use of narrative descriptions and the Authority is continuing to consider which performance measures support this.
- 39 The actions needed to achieve delivery of the improvement objectives are clearly set out and are monitored monthly by senior managers. From April 2012 the Authority revised its reporting to members to provide more timely information that allows senior managers and members to identify and take any corrective action needed if progress is not in line with that anticipated. This suite of reports provide detailed information against actions in individual business plans that are needed to achieve improvement objectives and are comprehensive and easy to read, but they are not linked to improvement objectives or collated to give an overall view of achievement against improvement objectives overall. Although reporting of performance measures continues to reflect statutory and core indicators only and are not linked to improvement objectives the Authority is currently considering which performance measures best help to explain progress.



40 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.

41 The Authority has continued to develop its provision of Welsh language services to the public during 2011-2012, by recruiting bilingual staff to work on its main reception. The Commissioner welcomed the Authority's intention to set in motion a Strategy for Recruitment and Training in the County Command areas where the workforce's Welsh language skills fell short of the required need in the local area. Ensuring this strategy is in place as soon as possible will be a positive step forward in developing a bilingual workforce. The Authority's robust scrutiny process has however identified that further training is required to ensure that all departments fully comply with its *Welsh Language Scheme* when corresponding with the public. The Authority will be expected to strengthen its compliance role during 2013 and has committed to the provision of bespoke training for Administrators, the introduction of specific guidance for staff and to strengthened reporting arrangements.

## The Authority continues to manage its financial challenges effectively

42 The Authority has a sound approach to financial management, although the scale of change required will continue to require clear leadership and direction.

43 The financial forecast for the three-year period to 2014-15 shows the Authority needs to deliver cumulative projected efficiencies of £2 million in addition to the £1.2 million achieved in 2011-12. The Authority updated the forecast as part of the 2013-14 budget-setting process and we will review this as part of our 2013-14 work.

44 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.

45 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

- 46 The Authority has made progress in implementing proposals for improvement in our Annual Improvement Report 2012.
- 47 During Autumn 2012 the Peer Assessment Team 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 Team 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 the Team 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

- 48 We reviewed the Authority's approach to public engagement and concluded that the Authority demonstrates a strong commitment towards developing its public engagement activity, demonstrated by joint working with partners and clients to address the needs of vulnerable members of the community. It now needs to develop a more comprehensive co-ordinated and strategic approach to public engagement and ensure that data arising from its engagement activities is more effectively evaluated.

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

- 49 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. Its review 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 arrangements and made plans to address them.
- 50 There are four key areas where greater emphasis should be placed in reviewing the Annual Governance Statement:
- ensure greater involvement of staff across the Authority;
  - place a greater emphasis on community engagement;
  - ensure adequate comparison of performance with other improvement authorities takes place: and
  - better consideration of Governance arrangements around partnerships and commissioning.

## 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 Mid and West 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 Person<sup>2</sup> 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;

<sup>2</sup> 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 registered electorate in each area. It comprises 25 councillors from the six unitary authorities of Mid and West 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 £45 million per year (2011-12). In the same year the Authority also spent £7.6 million in capital items. This equates to about £51 per resident.

The current Chairman of the Fire and Rescue Authority is Councillor Roy Llewellyn.

The Authority acts as the main policy making body and governs the adoption of various working practices inline with statutory guidelines laid down by the Welsh Government. It meets on a quarterly basis and its work is supported by four main committees; namely Performance Audit and Scrutiny; Resource Management; Standards; and Remuneration. All of these groups meet regularly to consider issues within their areas of responsibility. 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 Richard Smith, the Chief Fire Officer supported by the Executive Board that consists of the Chief Fire Officer and Principal Officers who lead operational directorates.

For more information see the Authority's own website at [www.mawwfire.gov.uk](http://www.mawwfire.gov.uk) or contact the Authority at Authority Headquarters, Lime Grove Avenue, Carmarthen, SA31 1SP.

## Appendix 3

### Appointed Auditor's Annual Audit Letter

Richard Smith  
Chief Fire Officer  
Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters  
Lime Grove Avenue  
Carmarthen  
SA31 1SP

Dear Richard

#### **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 Fire Authority in my Audit of Financial Statements report on the 17 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. Elizabeth Aitken, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

## Appendix 4

# Mid and West 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.mawwfire.gov.uk](http://www.mawwfire.gov.uk). They are:

Improvement Objectives 2011-12	Improvement Objectives 2012-13
<p><b>1 Value for Money:</b> Implement the key outcomes of the 2010-11 Service Review Programme to reduce costs and improve the efficiency of service delivery.</p>	<p><b>Managing Risk</b> That children and young people in Mid and West Wales are safe and responsible citizens.</p> <p><b>What we will do in 2012-13</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work with partners to engage with children and young people and their families and provide education on community safety and responsible citizenship.</li><li>• Use our Specialist Youth Team to divert children and young people from fire crime and associated anti social behaviour.</li><li>• Identify and disseminate good practice in working with Children and Young People.</li><li>• Develop strategies with partners such as Youth Offending Teams to make sure we reach those who most need our support.</li><li>• Evaluate the effectiveness of our partnership arson reduction initiatives and interventions.</li><li>• Implement the 'Fire and Rescue Authorities Strategy for Children and Young People'.</li></ul>



Improvement Objectives 2011-12	
<p><b>2 Emergency Response:</b></p> <p>Effective employee safety and welfare helps us meet the challenges faced at emergency incidents and robust training and response arrangements will help achieve this.</p>	
<p><b>3 Community Wide Resilience:</b></p> <p>Continue to develop our ability to respond to exceptional events that impact upon our communities and the Service by working with partner agencies to develop and practice emergency plans.</p>	

Improvement Objectives 2012-13	
<p><b>Managing People</b></p> <p>A workforce that is multi-skilled, competent, safe and flexible and meets the needs of our communities.</p>	
<p><b>What we will do in 2012-13</b></p> <p>Provide additional skills and knowledge to our employees on management and communication to support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The All Wales Equality and Diversity Strategy.</li> <li>• Effective Communication</li> <li>• Inspirational and motivated managers</li> <li>• Inter departmental awareness</li> <li>• Enhanced supervision skills</li> <li>• Health &amp; Safety knowledge</li> <li>• Mentoring of colleagues</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Working Together</b></p> <p>That vulnerable citizens live safely in our communities</p>	
<p><b>What we will do in 2012-13</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work collaboratively with other emergency services and agencies such as Local Health Boards.</li> <li>• Continue to develop partnerships with the voluntary and care sector.</li> <li>• Use our Third Sector Co-ordinator and Partnership Officer to identify partners.</li> <li>• Continue working with specialists from Local Health Boards to identify vulnerable people.</li> <li>• Identify and share any of our data that can benefit partners.</li> <li>• Develop technology to facilitate the sharing of data.</li> <li>• Monitor and review our existing partnerships so that they remain current and effective.</li> <li>• Share public engagement and consultation events with other Services.</li> </ul>	

Improvement Objectives 2011-12
<p><b>4 Sustainability and the Environment:</b></p> <p>We published our Sustainability and Environmental Strategy in June 2009 setting out our vision of how we will contribute to this agenda.</p>
<p><b>5 Partnership Working:</b></p> <p>To progress our strategic partnership working to ensure our community safety goals are fulfilled.</p>

Improvement Objectives 2012-13
<p><b>Managing Resources</b></p> <p>A high performing and efficient Service, managing resources effectively and delivering excellent value for money to our communities.</p>
<p><b>What we will do in 2012-2013</b></p> <p>Provide a service to the Community of Llanelli that meets its needs by developing a crewing system at Llanelli Community Fire Station that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflects the profile of the local community.</li> <li>• Maintains 24 hour cover provided by full-time staff.</li> <li>• Maintains response times.</li> <li>• Provides a more efficient use of resources.</li> </ul> <p>Continue to deliver the improvements to Information and Communication arrangements as identified in the Wales Audit Office Review.</p>

## 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.mawwfire.gov.uk](http://www.mawwfire.gov.uk) (Performance Assessment 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"><li>• develop a more strategic, co-ordinated and planned approach to include all of public engagement activity, to minimise duplication of work, identify risk areas, budgets and resources required; and</li><li>• identify and define outcomes for all public engagement activity to help prioritise what engagement activity is essential for the Authority, its partners and the public it serves.</li></ul>
P2	Develop methods to more robustly analyse and evaluate the results and data arising from all public engagement activities.
P3	Provide more detailed feedback to the public and stakeholders to clearly show in more detail how their input has improved services and therefore influenced what the Authority does.
P4	Publish a Summary Assessment of Performance to provide a clear and concise update for the public and help the Authority explain its achievements and future challenges. This should be widely available and signposted where further information can be obtained.

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