

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	15 April 2024
Lead Officer	Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer
Subject	Independent Cultural Review



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 This paper is to update Members as to the cultural journey of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) and progress towards commissioning an Independent Cultural Review.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 Work to develop the culture within NWFRS commenced in 2021. In March 2024 it was agreed with the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership to jointly commission with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service (MAWWFRS) an independent cultural review. This will contribute to the ongoing progress of NWFRS in improving the working environment of employees and the provision of Services to the public of North Wales.

OBSERVATIONS FROM EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 3 This paper builds upon the verbal update provided to Members of the Executive Panel and Audit Committee by the Chief Fire Officer on 18 March 2024.

RECOMMENDATION

- 4 That Members:
 - i) Note the contents of the paper; and
 - ii) approve the creation of a reserve to fund the independent review and supporting roles within the Service.

BACKGROUND

- 5 From the appointment of the new Chief Fire Officer in 2021, North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) has supported her desire to improve NWFRS and its culture. To that end, Members supported the findings of the Chief Fire Officer when she reported back to them after visiting every station, crew and department in her first 100 days.

- 6 Similarly, Members endorsed the need for an independent cultural survey to be undertaken in September 2021 to provide a baseline assessment of the existing culture. Following this, an action plan was created to improve the culture of the Service. The progress made over 24 months was reassessed with another independent cultural survey in September 2023 and reported back to Authority Members at a Members Culture Seminar in February 2024.
- 7 In the meantime, on the 3 January 2024, the Independent Culture Review into South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS) was published. In response to the findings on the 5 February 2024 the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, Hannah Blythyn, announced the removal of South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and the appointment of four independent commissioners to ensure that the recommendations from the review and those made by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser were acted upon.

INFORMATION

- 8 The Chair of the Authority and the Chief Fire Officer met with the Deputy Minister and her officials on the 19 February and 4 March 2024 to discuss the progress that has been made around culture within NWFRS. She recognises that both NWFRS and MAWWFRS are in a different place on their cultural journey to SWFRS. Both Services agree with the Deputy Minister's statement issued on the 11 March 2024 that the public sector in Wales can be a beacon of inclusivity and support, not just for their workforces, but for the communities in which they serve.
- 9 To further this intent, both MAWWFRS and NWFRS proposed to the Deputy Minister that they would jointly commission the services of an external organisational culture specialist to undertake a review of the progress both FRSs are making. This was agreed and it formed the basis of the statement issued by the Deputy Minister on the 11 March 2024.
- 10 The Terms of Reference have been agreed based upon the bullet points of the Deputy Minister's statement and the intention is to procure these services through a framework. Until tenders are received we cannot quantify the cost to NWFRS but it would be prudent to create a reserve to fund the review and temporary posts to support the workload.
- 11 As part of the proposed review, and through the appointed specialist provider, the views and experiences of interested parties, including current and former staff, will be sought. These observations will be captured and considered to ensure that they are reflected within the overall report conclusions and future action plans. Both FRS's have agreed that such feedback will be limited to experiences within a set timeframe, which is yet to be agreed.

- 12 The final report from the independent culture specialists, together with any identified areas for improvement, will be presented to both Fire and Rescue Authorities and the Welsh Government, as further evidence of independent assurance. It is envisaged that both these separate reviews will contribute to the ongoing progress of MAWWFRS and NWFRS in improving their organisational culture whilst also evidencing and assuring stakeholders of both Services' commitment and progress to cultural change.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	This ongoing work will contribute to the well-being goals of a More Equal Wales and a Healthier Wales
Budget	A reserve will be put aside to fund the review and temporary roles to support the process
Legal	None
Staffing	This will be determined once the tenders for the review work have been assessed
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	This review will provide assurance and guidance as to continuing the improvement of culture within NWFRS
Risks	The Ministerial Statement has raised expectations with stakeholders and employees which should be met.