

Report to	<b>Audit Committee</b>
Date	<b>15 September 2025</b>
Lead Officer	<b>Justin Evans, Assistant Chief Fire Officer</b>
Contact Officer	<b>Justin Evans, Assistant Chief Fire Officer</b>
Subject	<b>Audit Wales Report: Putting out Future Fires</b>



## PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To present the findings and recommendations of the Audit Wales July 2025 report, 'Putting out Future Fires', on North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority)'s approach to targeting fire prevention work.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 Audit Wales has completed a performance audit of the Authority's fire prevention strategy, focusing on how effectively it targets its resources towards the most vulnerable households. The report acknowledges areas of promising practice, including the use of National Health Service (NHS) data and repeat visits to high-risk households. However, it identifies gaps in systematic targeting, value-for-money assessment, and inclusive engagement. Two formal recommendations have been made to strengthen the Authority's approach.

## RECOMMENDATION

- 3 It is recommended that Members:
  - i) **Note the findings and recommendations of the Audit Wales report;**
  - ii) **Endorse the development of a targeted improvement plan addressing the two recommendations; and**
  - iii) **Request a progress update in Q1 of 2026-27 on implementation actions.**

## BACKGROUND

- 4 The audit was conducted under Section 17(2)(d) of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and informed by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. It focussed on household-level fire prevention, excluding youth education, wildfire reduction, and road safety.

## INFORMATION

- 5 The Audit Wales report provides a balanced view of the Authority's prevention work, recognising several areas of strength while highlighting opportunities for development.
- 6 Positive activity highlighted includes:
  - A 33% reduction in dwelling fires and 43% reduction in fire casualties since 2009-10;
  - Use of NHS data and mapping tools to identify and track high-risk households;
  - Repeat visits to higher-risk homes, recognising that risk factors often increase over time;
  - Quality assurance checks for both specialist officers and fire crews;
  - Partner training to improve referral accuracy and consistency; and
  - Performance dashboard and regular reporting to senior leaders.
- 7 Key findings include:
  - The Authority has a good basic targeting approach but could be more consistent. Only 29.4% of home safety checks were in higher-risk homes, suggesting scope to sharpen our focus.
  - Data gaps remain — particularly around isolated individuals and emerging risks.
  - Referral and data-led cases could be treated differently, which may lead to unequal outcomes.
  - Equality data is limited, making it harder to demonstrate compliance with legal duties.
  - Scrutiny from Members has been limited, and learning from incidents could be more systematic.
- 8 The report makes two recommendations: one on improving how to identify and reach higher-risk individuals, and one on strengthening the Authority's understanding of the value added by its prevention activity.

## IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The report supports North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service)'s commitment to prevention and sustainable development, but highlights the need for more inclusive engagement and systematic evaluation.
Budget	The Authority received £240,000 in 2023-24 for home safety equipment. Funding pressures, including the loss of arson reduction grants and rising equipment costs, require prioritisation of core prevention activities.
Legal	The findings relate to compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and Socio-Economic Duty. Improvements in data use and community engagement are needed to demonstrate legal alignment.
Staffing	No immediate staffing implications, but potential need for enhanced training and quality assurance for officers and partners involved in referrals and home safety checks.
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The report identifies gaps in monitoring protected characteristics and socio-economic indicators. Actions will be taken to improve inclusivity and bilingual service delivery.
Risks	Risk of missing high-risk individuals due to data gaps or inconsistent referral practices. Risk of unequal outcomes for similar households due to current targeting thresholds. Risk of reduced prevention impact if funding pressures are not mitigated.