

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	12 December 2022
Lead Officer	Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Shân Morris, Assistant Chief Officer
Subject	Reducing False Alarms



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To introduce the Terms of Reference for this year's thematic review being undertaken by Audit Wales.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2 That Members note:
 - (i) The purpose of the review;
 - (ii) The main questions the review seeks to answer; and
 - (iii) The timescales for the review.

BACKGROUND

- 3 The performance review for 2022-23 of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) undertaken by Audit Wales, will focus on the progress made to reduce and prevent false fire alarms.
- 4 The review is being undertaken to help discharge the Auditor General's duties under sections 17 and 41 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004. It also informs an examination undertaken by the Auditor General under section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.
- 5 A false alarm is defined as an event where a fire and rescue crew attend an incident believing there to be a fire, but on arrival discover that no incident exists or has existed.
- 6 The purpose of the review by Audit Wales, is to provide assurance to the people of Wales, the Welsh Government and the Authority that sufficient progress is being made in reducing the prevalence of fire false alarms and the associated costs from primarily non-domestic (not a house or home) buildings. It will also identify good practice to see wider benefits, such as carbon emissions reduction.

INFORMATION

- 7 Since 2009, all Fire and Rescue Authorities have been required to record the incidents they attend via the online Incident Recording System (IRS). This includes fire false alarms, which are categorised into three sub-categories:
 - due to apparatus – where an alarm or firefighting equipment operate in error, including accidental activation by people;
 - good intent – where a person believes in good faith that the Fire and Rescue Service is required; and
 - malicious – where a person intends for a response to a non-existing incident.

- 8 The review by Audit Wales will largely involve document reviews and interviews and will seek to answer if the Authority is doing all it can to reduce the prevalence and responses to non-domestic fire false alarms by identifying if:
 - the Authority have a good understanding of the locations, causes and impacts of fire false alarms in non-domestic premises;
 - has a clear and appropriate plan or strategy for addressing fire false alarms considering risk and suitable evidence;
 - the Authority regularly evaluates and monitors performance to ensure fire alarms are reducing; and
 - the Authority has reduced the volume of fire alarms it responds to in non-domestic premises.

- 9 The intended benefits of the review will provide assurance that the Authority has an appropriate strategy in place to reduce fire false alarms in non-domestic premises, that value for money is secured in the use of resources and to provide insight into opportunities for improvement.

- 10 It is expected that some of the benefits identified from the undertaking of the review will already have been realised in North Wales, following the approval by the Authority in 2004 of a change in the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service's (the Service's) attendance to fire false alarms at non-domestic premises.

- 11 The procedure for attendance at fire alarms currently in place in North Wales stipulates that the Service will not attend fire false alarms in non-domestic premises unless there is a confirmed fire during a 999 call, with some premises exempt. Though this procedure has been refreshed recently, it is anticipated there may be opportunities to refine the procedure further following receipt of the review recommendations.

- 12 The proposed timetable for the review commences from July 2022, with interviews of members, staff working across various roles and key partners taking place during October 2022 – January 2023. It is expected that officers will receive draft feedback during January 2023, with the report being issued to the Authority during March 2023.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The review informs an examination undertaken by the Auditor General under section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.
Budget	No budget requirements have been identified for the undertaking of the review.
Legal	The review helps to discharge the Auditor General's duties under sections 17 and 41 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004.
Staffing	<p>The review will include interviews with Members and staff from various roles in the Service, which may have an impact on them carrying out their roles though this is likely to be minimal.</p> <p>Information and data requests from Audit Wales will be facilitated by the contact officer and members of the Service Corporate Planning Team.</p>
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	The Project Brief is available in Welsh and English and interviews have been offered by the Auditors in Welsh and English.
Risks	None identified.