

Safeguarding Annual Report 2024-25



Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
Fire and Rescue Service



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1. Purpose of Report

This Annual Safeguarding Report outlines the safeguarding activities undertaken by North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025. It reaffirms the Service's commitment to protecting vulnerable individuals across North Wales, detailing the number and nature of safeguarding referrals made for both children and adults at risk. The report also highlights the proactive role of staff in identifying and responding to signs of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. In addition to referral data, the report showcases significant improvements in safeguarding governance, training, and inter-agency collaboration. It provides assurance to the Service Leadership Team, the Fire and Rescue Authority, and partners that safeguarding responsibilities are being met in line with Welsh legislation and national guidance. The Service continues to prioritise continuous improvement, ensuring its safeguarding practices evolve to meet emerging needs and uphold the highest standards of care and protection.

2. Children and Young People Safeguarding statistics

In 2024, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) made a total of 24 child safeguarding referrals across the region. Denbighshire accounted for the highest number with 8 referrals representing one-third of the total. This may reflect a higher incidence of child safeguarding concerns, proactive identification and reporting by local fire crews, or a concentration of vulnerable populations (e.g., areas with higher deprivation or more care settings). Conwy and Flintshire recorded 6 each, and Gwynedd with 4. Notably, Wrexham and Ynys Môn reported no referrals, raising concerns about potential underreporting or gaps in safeguarding awareness and engagement in those areas.

The five-year trend shows a peak in 2022 (32 referrals), followed by a gradual decline to 24 in 2024. While this may suggest a reduction in incidents, it could also reflect changes in reporting practices. The three-year average (2022–2024) stands at 28 referrals, while the five-year average (2020–2024) is 20.8. These figures underscore the importance of continued vigilance, targeted training, and consistent safeguarding practices across all unitary authorities to ensure that no child at risk goes unnoticed.

3. Adult Safeguarding Statistics

In 2024, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) made a total of 269 adult safeguarding referrals, reflecting the Service's strong commitment to protecting vulnerable adults across the region. Conwy accounted for the highest number of referrals (77), representing nearly 29% of the total. This may indicate a higher prevalence of safeguarding concerns, more effective reporting mechanisms, or demographic factors such as a larger elderly population.

Gwynedd (46), Denbighshire (39), and Flintshire (37) showed moderate referral levels, suggesting balanced engagement, though potential underreporting cannot be ruled out. Wrexham (34) and Ynys Môn (36) had the fewest referrals, which may reflect either fewer incidents or gaps in detection and reporting.

The five-year trend shows a steady increase in referrals, rising from 91 in 2020 to a peak of 275 in 2023, with a slight dip to 269 in 2024. This upward trajectory highlights the growing role of NWFRS in safeguarding, underlining its evolving function as a key partner in community safety and social care through a multi-agency approach.

4. Learning and Improvement

North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) remains committed to equipping all staff with the necessary safeguarding knowledge and competencies. Unlike many UK fire and rescue services that follow the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Safeguarding Training Levels 1–4, NWFRS aligns its training with the Social Care Wales Safeguarding Levels A–F. While this approach ensures alignment with the broader health and social care sector in Wales, it has introduced operational and strategic challenges, particularly around consistency, comparability, and planning.

The NFCC framework offers a well-established, tiered model widely adopted across UK fire services, supported by national resources and guidance. In contrast, the Social Care Wales model, though comprehensive has been rolled out incrementally, leading to delays and uncertainty in implementation. This divergence has made it more difficult for NWFRS to benchmark training standards nationally and ensure uniform safeguarding capability across all roles. Addressing these challenges will be key to maintaining effective safeguarding practice and ensuring staff are fully supported in their responsibilities.

5. Operational Impact and Mitigation

North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) continues to face operational challenges in delivering safeguarding training due to the requirement that trainers must be qualified at a level above the one they teach. This has limited internal training capacity, particularly for Levels B and above, as qualifications are not yet fully accessible. To mitigate this, Level A training has been made widely available via LearnPro and PDRPro, with 906 completions recorded. Additionally, NWFRS is collaborating with Conwy County Borough Council to enable Safeguarding Officers and Partnership Managers to deliver Level B training, which will be rolled out to all front-facing staff.

Mandatory safeguarding training is now in place for all staff, with regular refreshers planned. The Service has also improved internal safeguarding communication and clarified referral pathways to ensure timely and appropriate action. A total of 893 staff have completed Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDA) training, reinforcing NWFRS's commitment to a well-informed workforce.

Oversight of safeguarding practices is maintained through a combination of internal governance and external audits. The Auditor General for Wales, via Audit Wales, provides overarching scrutiny, while Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW) and Regional Safeguarding Boards may conduct safeguarding-specific reviews. Internal audit teams also play a key role in ensuring compliance and continuous improvement, reinforcing transparency and accountability across the Service.

6. Safeguarding Priorities and Strategic Direction – 2025

Over the next year, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) will embed safeguarding more deeply into everyday operations. A key focus will be on training staff to identify and respond to safeguarding concerns, while ensuring that trained safeguarding leads are in place across the East, Central, and West areas. The Service also aims to enhance how it records, reviews, and learns from safeguarding cases to better protect vulnerable individuals.

Strategically, NWFRS will strengthen its safeguarding framework by integrating safeguarding leads functionally across the organisation and aligning safeguarding with broader community risk reduction efforts. Training priorities include expanding internal capacity to deliver Level B training and preparing for higher-level delivery as qualifications become available. Improvements in data collection and reporting will support greater scrutiny, learning, and accountability.

To support these goals, NWFRS is transitioning to a functional safeguarding officer model, led by a dedicated Safeguarding Officer. This structure will provide clearer leadership, consistent practice, and stronger engagement with external partners. Robust governance mechanisms will be implemented to monitor safeguarding performance, identify emerging risks, and ensure compliance with statutory duties.

7. Conclusion

NWFRS is taking a proactive and structured approach to safeguarding, ensuring it is not only a compliance requirement but a core part of its service culture. Through strategic planning, staff development, and strengthened governance, the Service is well-positioned to enhance its safeguarding impact and protect the most vulnerable in North Wales.