



North Wales Fire & Rescue Service

DRAFT Annual Governance Statement 2025-26

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT ON INTERNAL CONTROL

For the year ending 31 March 2026

This Statement has been prepared in accordance with The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 and the guidance produced by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE), the 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework' 2016, including the 2025 Addendum on the Annual Review of Governance and the Annual Governance Statement.

The relationships between the seven principles for good governance in the public sector are illustrated below.

Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (CIPFA and Solace, 2016)



Fig. 1 How Principles for good governance relate to each other.

Source: international Framework-[Good Governance in the Public Sector](#)

This Annual Governance Statement explains how North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (The Authority) has complied with the framework and its seven core principles of good governance to ensure that resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and priorities.

Scope of Responsibility

North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority is responsible for ensuring that:

- business is conducted in accordance with all relevant laws and regulations
- public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for
- resources are used economically, efficiently, effectively and equitably to achieve agreed priorities which benefit local people.

In discharging its overall responsibility, Members and Senior Officers are responsible for putting in place appropriate arrangements for the governance of the Authority's affairs and the stewardship of the resources at its disposal, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

Strategic leadership is given by and discharged through the Authority and its various Committees, panels and working groups, which enable Members to decide on issues affecting the running of the Authority, in accordance with the principles of openness and democratic accountability.

The Purpose of the System of Internal Control

To fulfil its wide range of functions, the Authority must satisfy political, economic, social and environmental objectives over the short, medium and longer term. This subjects it to a different set of external and internal constraints and incentives from those found in the private sector, all of which affect its governance arrangements.

A key piece of legislation in Wales is the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which requires the Authority to consider the longer term in making its decisions and to work collaboratively with other public bodies to improve well-being in Wales.

Stakeholders are, therefore, interested in issues such as:

- whether the Authority's planned outputs have been delivered and outcomes achieved, and
- whether this has been done in an efficient, economic, effective and equitable manner.

To deliver good governance in the public sector, both governing bodies and individuals working for public sector organisations must try to achieve their objectives while acting in the public interest at all times, which implies primary consideration of the benefits for society, which should result in positive outcomes for service users and other stakeholders.

This Statement gives assurances that North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority has complied with the governance framework for the year ended 31st March 2026.

The Governance Framework

North Wales Fire Authority currently comprises 28 elected councillors from the six unitary authorities of North Wales, with the number of representatives determined by the population of the area. More information about the Authority, its members and responsibilities can be found [here](#).

The Authority is required to review the effectiveness of its arrangements each year to ensure that there is a sound system of governance. The key contributors to this process include:

Having an Authority and committee structure that:

- monitors the effectiveness of risk management arrangements
- regularly reviews the governance arrangements
- considers and reviews internal and external audit strategies, plans and reports
- reviews, scrutinises and approves the annual statement of accounts.

Having an Executive Panel that:

- provides leadership on governance
- contributes to the completion and review of the Annual Governance Statement
- provides clear direction to the Service and senior managers.

The use of information from various sources to inform the governance arrangements, for example:

- improvement and performance board reports
- risk management arrangements
- external regulator reports
- internal audit reports

The Authority's normal schedule of meetings are attended remotely. The full Fire and Rescue Authority meetings are webcast in Welsh and English simultaneously. All meetings are made available to the public to observe, should they make a request to do so.

The Authority recognises the Welsh Government's [Written Statement on the Governance of Fire and Rescue Services](#), which signals potential future changes to governance arrangements across Wales. While these proposals are not yet embedded within the Service, the Authority is taking them into account as part of its ongoing assessment of governance effectiveness and future readiness.

Early in 2023, the Authority established two working-groups to support the development of two key organisational priorities:

- The Emergency Cover Review Working Group, which has now been superseded by a Collective Agreement Task and Finish Group with Trade Union representation but no longer any Fire Authority representation.
- The new Training and Development Centre Working Group.

In addition, a member of the Fire and Rescue Authority sits on the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee as a member champion, and following the report of the CREST cultural review report, the Chief Fire Officer now chairs a Cultural Board to manage the implementation of the Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan, which is published on the Fire Authority website, [06i-strategic-cultural-improvement-plan.pdf](#)

During 2025-26, the Authority developed its third Community Risk Management Implementation Plan ([CRMIP 2026/27](#)), approved April 2026, to deliver against the objectives outlined in the five-year [Community Risk Management Plan \(CRMP\) 2024-2029](#)

A Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) aims to identify risks facing the community and describes how the Fire and Rescue Authority will manage those risks and continue to prevent and respond to fires and other emergencies.

The Authority has developed five principles for keeping communities safe and the CRMP;

- Acknowledges the requirements of key legislation
- Considers the ongoing work of the Public Services Boards
- Identifies the risks facing our communities
- Outlines what activity the Authority had taken to address these risks
- Explains what actions the Authority will take over the next five years to mitigate those risks
- Aligns with the Authority's revenue budget, capital plan and medium term financial plan.

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- Fig 2. Committees of the Fire and Rescue Authority

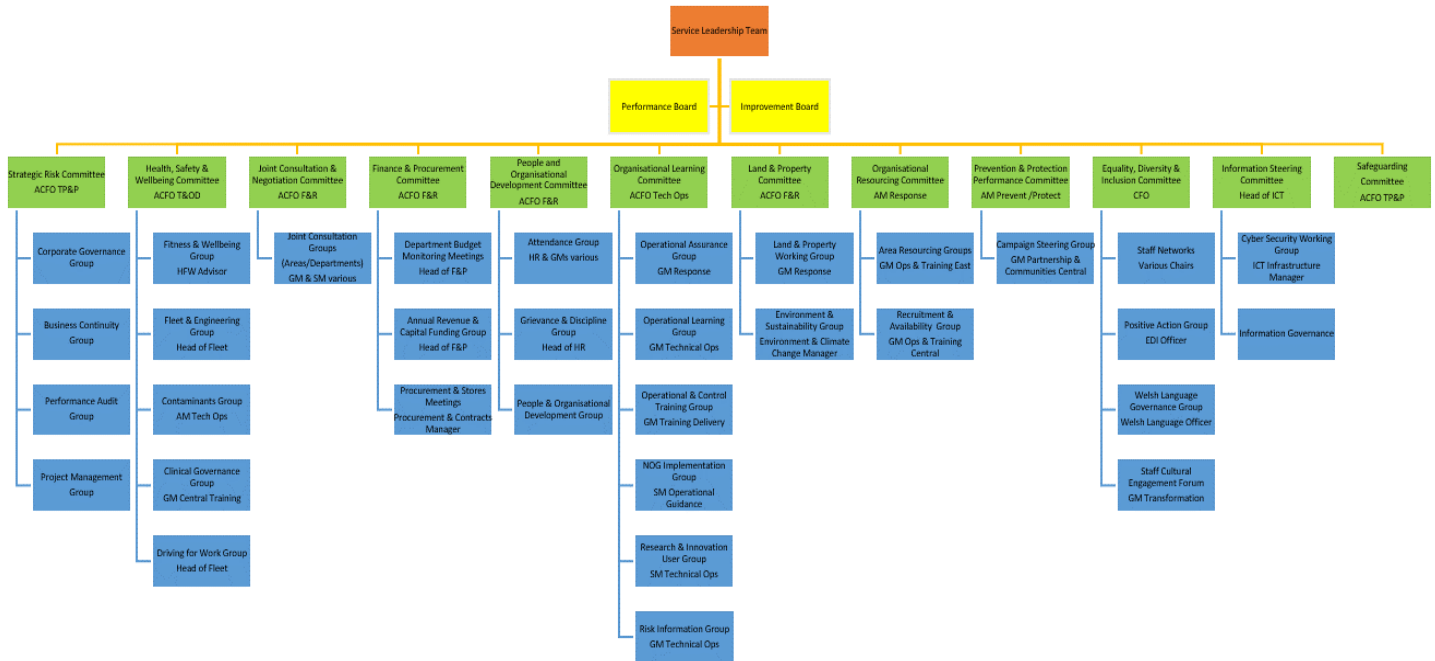


Fig 2. Committees of the Fire and Rescue Authority

The Authority has delegated responsibility for the day to day operation of the Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) to the Chief Fire Officer.

The Chief Fire Officer is supported by The Executive Group comprising the Principal Officers, (Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers) which is responsible for strategic leadership.

The Service Leadership Team (SLT), includes the Principal Officers, Area Managers and Heads of Department. It meets as a Performance Board to scrutinise performance, and as an Improvement Board to provide challenge and senior oversight of programmes, projects and policies. The SLT provides organisational leadership and service delivery.

The Service Governance and Assurance Structure of committees and groups, reporting to SLT, are embedded across the organisation, demonstrating robust governance across reporting, monitoring, scrutiny and decision making within all areas of the organisation. During 2025–26, the effectiveness of the existing governance structure was reviewed and enhancements were identified to further strengthen oversight, clarity of accountability and assurance across the organisation.



Fig 3. Service Leadership Team

Key Contributors to Developing and Maintaining the Governance Framework

Constitution	The purpose of the Constitution is to set out in clear language how the Fire Authority works and how it makes decisions
Fire Authority	Provides strategic leadership, democratic accountability and corporate challenge in relation to the provision of fire and rescue services across North Wales, encouraging public participation and conducting its affairs in an open and transparent manner. It agrees the Improvement and Wellbeing Plan, and the revenue and capital budgets.
Executive Panel	Monitors the performance of the Service and makes recommendations to the Authority on its key policies including the Improvement and Wellbeing Plan. The Panel reviews the strategic risk register.
Audit Committee	Provides independent review of the governance, risk management and control frameworks and oversees the financial reporting, including the Treasury Management Strategy and annual accounts.
Standards Committee	Promotes and maintains high standards of conduct by Members of the Authority and oversees the whistle-blowing policy for complaints against Members of the Authority. Also, where statute permits, to receive reports and complaints about Members and to conduct or oversee investigations and make recommendations to the Authority.
Fire Authority Working Groups	Undertake detailed work associated with the Authority's planning and budget-setting process. It submits its observations to the Executive Panel which in turn makes recommendations for improvement/risk reduction/well-being objectives to the Authority.

Service Leadership Team	Sets and leads the implementation of the governance standards across the Service. Receives the annual improvement plan and feeds into the annual self-assessment.
Section 151 Officer	Ensures lawful and financially prudent decision making. Administration of financial affairs. Accountable for developing and maintaining the Fire Authority's governance, risk and control framework. Contributes to the effective corporate management and governance of the Fire Authority
Monitoring Officer	Reports on contraventions of any enactment or rule of law. Reports on any maladministration or injustice where the Local Government Ombudsman has carried out an investigation. Maintains and updates the Constitution. Maintains registers of member interests and gifts and hospitality. Advises Members on the interpretation of the Code of Conduct.
Internal Audit	Provides independent assurance and annual opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Fire Authority's governance, risk management and control framework. Delivers an annual programme of risk-based audit activity, including counter fraud and investigation activity. Makes recommendations for improvements in the management of risk.
External Audit	Provides independent assurance to the Fire Authority on financial reporting, governance arrangements and the use of resources, including an opinion on the annual statement of accounts and value for money conclusion. Undertakes statutory audit activity in accordance with the Auditor General for Wales' Code of Audit Practice, including consideration of the Service's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Identifies and reports significant governance, financial or value for money issues, and makes recommendations to support improvement and accountability.

CIPFA Principles - Governance Assurance

Principle A: Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law.

The Authority's [Missions and Values](#) are published within the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) and on the [Authority's website](#), providing a shared framework that underpins decision-making, behaviour and organisational culture.

These values are supported by a robust constitutional framework. The Authority's [Constitution](#) sets out the roles and responsibilities of the Fire and Rescue Authority, its Committees and Officers, including the Scheme of Delegation to Officers. Compliance with the Constitution is supported by the Monitoring Officer, who provides assurance that decisions are taken appropriately, and legally. Where required, legal advice is sought to inform

decision-making and manage legal risk. The Constitution also incorporates the [Code of Conduct for Members](#), which is monitored by the Standards Committee, reinforcing ethical leadership and accountability.

In order to support transparency and prevent conflicts of interest, the declaration of personal and business interests and the recording of gifts and hospitality if required. Registers are maintained and published on the Authority's website as part of each [Member's personal profile](#), enabling public oversight and accountability.

Ethical governance is further reinforced through policies. These include the Whistleblowing Policy, [Anti-Fraud, Bribery and Corruption Policy](#), [Financial Regulations](#) and [Contract Procedure Rules](#). Where concerns or irregularities are identified, clear arrangements are in place to ensure that matters are investigated thoroughly and appropriately. The availability of Safecall, an independent, confidential reporting service operating 24/7, supports a culture in which concerns can be raised safely, including anonymously where appropriate.

Alongside formal controls, the Authority seeks to embed ethical values through its people management arrangements. Recruitment, induction and training processes emphasise expected behaviours and alignment with core values.

Equality, diversity and inclusion form a key part of the Authority's ethical framework. Governance oversight is provided through the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Steering Committee, established in 2022, and through a published five year [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029](#). Implementation of the Strategy is guided by a detailed annual action plan which is performance managed and reviewed quarterly, and incorporates new EHCR monitoring, providing assurance that equality considerations are embedded into governance and decision making.

The Service also maintains robust arrangements to uphold professional standards and address misconduct. Disciplinary cases and allegations of wrongdoing are managed in accordance with the Service's Discipline policy and procedures, with two dedicated Discipline and Grievance Officers ensuring matters are dealt with promptly, consistently and professionally.

The Authority recognises its responsibilities in relation to the Welsh language as an integral part of ethical and lawful service delivery. Compliance with Welsh Language Standards is demonstrated through the publication of the [Welsh Language Standards Monitoring report 2024-25](#) on the Authority's website. In addition, workforce capability is supported by requirements for all new employees to achieve a minimum of Level 2 Welsh language skills, progressing to Level 3 upon promotion.

Setting and delivering lawful, ethical objectives is supported through the [Community Risk Management Plan 2024-29](#), which sets out the Authority's

Improvement Objectives and Well-being Objectives. The Plan has been subject to public and stakeholder consultation, with the ratified five-year Plan and the [2026-27 Implementation Plan](#) published on the Authority's website. These arrangements ensure compliance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Alignment with the Well-being of Future Generations Act is further reflected across departmental plans and policies where applicable.

Safeguarding responsibilities are addressed through clear policies and procedures to ensure that vulnerable individuals encountered by the Service are referred appropriately to partner agencies. These arrangements are overseen by a dedicated Safeguarding Manager, providing specialist oversight and assurance.

The Authority has also adopted the Social Partnership Duty, building upon established arrangements with recognised staff representative bodies to support engagement on objectives and strategic decisions. The first [Social Partnership Duty Annual Report](#) was approved for publication and submission to the Social Partnership Council in April 2025, providing external assurance of compliance with statutory requirements.

Following the publication of the independent Crest Advisory cultural review in January 2025, the Authority further strengthened its governance arrangements through the establishment of a Culture Board and the appointment of dedicated culture champions. These arrangements support oversight and delivery of agreed cultural improvement actions.

The Authority also recognises the Welsh Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework 2026, including its recommendations in relation to leadership and organisational culture, and these considerations continue to inform the Authority's ongoing governance and assurance framework.

Principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.

The Authority is committed to openness, transparency and meaningful engagement as a core part of its governance framework. Authority and Committee meetings are publicly advertised, with agendas and supporting papers published on the [Authority's website](#). Full Authority meetings are webcast, enabling public access to decision-making and scrutiny.

Transparency is further supported through the Authority's Publication Scheme, with information published on the website. Documents are made available in Welsh and English, with Read/Speak versions provided where appropriate to support accessibility and inclusion.

Engagement with stakeholders is embedded within decision-making processes, particularly where significant change is proposed. Public consultation arrangements are in place to invite views prior to the

development and implementation of key changes. This included consultation on the objectives contained within the [Community Risk Management Implementation Plan 2026-27](#), which took place between October and December 2025. Consultation responses were reviewed in line with the Gunning Principles to ensure that engagement was meaningful, fair and transparent. A report summarising the feedback received and explaining how it informed the final plan was presented to the Authority. A full Equality Impact Assessment was also completed and, alongside the consultation findings, considered by the Authority prior to approval of the plan.

The [Authority has previously been recognised as achieving 'Good Practice' by the Consultation Institute](#), including for public consultation undertaken in connection with the ongoing Emergency Cover Review. This provides independent assurance regarding the quality and robustness of engagement arrangements.

Openness and engagement are also supported through a wider range of governance and communication arrangements. These include:

- the completion of impact assessments for key decisions,
- a Complaints and Compliments Procedure that provides clear escalation routes for significant matters for external complainants, and a grievance policy and procedure for internal complaints.
- a Public Engagement and Consultation Strategy that guides consistent practice.

The Authority also engages with recognised Employee Representative Bodies through both informal arrangements and formal structures, including the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee, with these arrangements further strengthened through the adoption of the Social Partnership Duty.

Regular engagement with staff is also supported through a biennial 'Fire Family' staff survey. In addition, the Authority participates in a range of external networks and forums, including the Welsh Local Government Association, North Wales Equality Leads Forum, Race Council Cymru and the North Wales Inter-Faith Forum.

A broad and inclusive range of engagement methods is used to reach communities, staff and stakeholders. These include directed communications through corporate social media channels, including Facebook and X, alongside locally-managed fire station accounts to support engagement within communities. Stakeholders are able to sign up for email updates on specific issues via the Authority's website. Engagement with children and young people is supported through programmes such as Phoenix, Fire Cadets and school visits, alongside wider community safety engagement with householders and businesses.

Targeted engagement also supports inclusive recruitment and prevention activity. This includes activity coordinated through a Positive Action Group,

chaired by the Organisational Development Manager, as well as attendance at open days and community events, such as the Eisteddfod and fire station-led events.

Internal communication is supported through the Weekly Brief electronic newsletter to staff, while external communication campaigns are led by Community Safety Managers.

Through Prevention and Recruitment activities, the Service engages with people of all ages and from diverse backgrounds.

The Authority also recognises the importance of partnership working in supporting openness, shared accountability and effective service delivery. Partnership arrangements are in place across a range of local, regional and national forums, including the All-Wales Joint Emergency Services Group, Local Resilience Forums, the three local Public Services Boards, the Regional Partnership Board, the Strategic Arson Reduction Board, and Local Safeguarding Adults and Children Boards, alongside collaboration with other emergency services.

In line with the Welsh Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework 2026, the Authority recognises the importance of effective collaboration and clear accountability. These principles continue to underpin the Authority's governance framework, engagement arrangements and partnership working.

Principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits.

The Authority defines its strategic outcomes through a clear and long-term planning framework. The five-year Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) sets the strategic direction for the Service and identifies Improvement Objectives in line with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, alongside Well-being Objectives in accordance with the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Together, these objectives provide a clear statement of the intended economic, social and environmental outcomes to be achieved.

The Authority's policies and decision-making arrangements reflect the sustainable development principle set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, ensuring that long-term impacts, prevention, integration, collaboration and involvement are considered when setting priorities and determining how services are delivered. All relevant strategies, plans and policies demonstrate alignment with this approach.

In defining and delivering its outcomes, the Authority also has regard to its environmental responsibilities under wider Welsh legislation, including the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. These duties are reflected within governance,

planning and assurance arrangements, supporting sustainable management of resources and environmental stewardship.

Financial sustainability underpins the Authority's ability to deliver long-term outcomes. During the year, the Medium-Term Resource Strategy (MTRS) was reviewed and updated for the period 2026–30, supporting long-term financial planning and informing decision-making as part of the Authority's governance and assurance framework. The MTRS, which includes a ten-year Capital Plan, alongside the annual budget-setting process, aims to ensure that financial resources are aligned with the Authority's priorities and intended outcomes.

The Authority also recognises that sustainable outcomes rely on social responsibility, fairness and workforce wellbeing. Mandatory eLearning in relation to the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act continues to be completed by all staff. As a [Disability Confident](#) employer, the Service is committed to the recruitment and retention of disabled people and those with health conditions, and it has signed the [Armed Forces Covenant](#) supported by an Armed Forces Reserves and Veterans Policy, to ensure fair treatment for those who serve or have served in the armed forces and their families. In addition, the Service pays [above the real living wage](#), supporting fair pay and workforce stability.

Safeguarding arrangements form a further element of the Authority's commitment to social sustainability. Clear safeguarding policies and procedures are in place to ensure that vulnerable people encountered by the Service are referred appropriately to partner agencies. Workforce and public protection is further supported through robust criminal records checking arrangements. Following changes to legislation, Fire and Rescue Authorities are listed in Schedule 1 to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions), enabling all employees to be subject to a minimum of a Standard level Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, renewed on a three-year cycle.

To further strengthen Safeguarding arrangements, the authority has implemented an anti-sexual harassment policy, and risk assessments have been conducted for every department. These are monitored by the Safeguarding Manager, working with the HR department.

The Authority also maintains business continuity arrangements to support organisational resilience and service continuity. As part of its statutory duties, business continuity plans are in place across the Service and are reviewed regularly. Ongoing collaboration with the National Fire Chiefs Council supports continuous improvement in planning and consideration of emerging and evolving risks.

To ensure that intended outcomes are assessed holistically, key decisions are supported by an integrated impact assessment. This considers equality, data protection, health, safety and wellbeing, Welsh language, finance, sustainability and workforce implications, alongside the requirements of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, the socio-economic duty and anticipated statutory health duties.

Environmental sustainability is further strengthened through the Authority's Environmental Strategy, which sets out clear and measurable performance targets to reduce carbon emissions and other significant environmental impacts. Progress is monitored through governance arrangements, and the Authority reports on its biodiversity duties through regular Biodiversity Reports, providing transparency and assurance on how environmental considerations are addressed within planning and decision-making.

Sustainability considerations are embedded within the Authority's wider governance framework, including the Contract Procedure Rules, which require consideration of social, economic and environmental benefits when undertaking relevant procurement activity, supporting value for money and wider community outcomes.

In line with the Welsh Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework 2026, the Authority recognises the importance of strengthening organisational capability and supporting sustainability and net-zero objectives. These considerations are fully integrated into the Authority's governance, strategic planning and resource allocation arrangements, ensuring that outcomes remain sustainable for current and future generations.

Principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

The Authority uses a combination of consultation, performance management, risk management and governance oversight to ensure that interventions are timely, proportionate and aligned to the achievement of its intended outcomes. Public consultation is undertaken as part of setting the Authority's objectives, including those contained within the Community Risk Management Implementation Plan. This ensures that objectives are informed by stakeholder views and community need before they are finalised and delivered.

Progress against annual objectives is monitored and assessed throughout the year, with a formal assessment of performance published each October. This provides transparency and enables the Authority to evaluate whether outcomes are being achieved or whether further intervention is required.

Risk management forms a core element of the Authority's approach to determining and prioritising intervention. The Strategic Risk Management

Policy sets out the process for identifying and managing risks that may affect the delivery of objectives or activities. Strategic risks are reviewed throughout the year via the Strategic Risk Committee, ensuring that emerging and changing risks are identified, mitigated and escalated appropriately. These arrangements are subject to internal scrutiny and external audit, providing assurance over their effectiveness.

Performance and financial information is subject to structured scrutiny through the Authority's governance arrangements. Following consideration by the Executive Group, performance and financial reports are presented to the Authority and its Committees. A quarterly Performance Monitoring Report is prepared for the Executive Panel, while more detailed operational scrutiny takes place through the Performance Board, where the Service Leadership Team reviews data relating to incident demand, emerging trends and resource availability. These arrangements ensure that issues are identified promptly and that appropriate corrective or mitigating actions are agreed.

Effective intervention is also supported through robust financial governance. Budget planning processes involve Service leads and Authority Members and are designed to align resources with risk-based objectives, while balancing the ongoing costs associated with maintaining estates, vehicles and equipment. The Budget, Monitoring and Procurement Committee provides strategic oversight and governance of these arrangements.

Operational learning and risk mitigation are overseen through the Organisational Learning Committee, which provides governance oversight of National Operational Guidance, National Operational Learning and Joint Organisational Learning. The Committee also oversees the collection and management of Site-Specific Risk Information and monitors activity relating to emerging risks, including work addressing the risk of fire from new technologies through the Battery Energy Storage System (Lithium-Ion) working group.

Recognising the scale and complexity of a number of significant change initiatives, the Service reviewed its approach to programme and project management during the year and identified the need to strengthen Programme and Project Management Office (PMO) arrangements. Plans have been put in place to further develop PMO capability during 2026–27, improving oversight, coordination, reporting and risk management for significant programmes and projects. This includes governance arrangements supporting work such as the review of emergency cover arrangements across North Wales, the review of rota systems, and major system implementation and migration projects.

Health, safety and wellbeing considerations also inform intervention and assurance arrangements. Health and safety incidents are reported, reviewed and monitored to ensure that risks to staff are identified and mitigated, with strategic oversight provided by the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

In addition, the Authority monitors delivery against shared national commitments. The [All Wales Dwelling Fire Response Charter](#) sets out seven high-level commitments relating to the prevention of and response to dwelling fires, with performance reported annually as part of the Authority's Annual Performance Assessment.

In line with the Welsh Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework 2026, the Authority recognises the importance of robust arrangements for identifying, evaluating and responding to risk. Risk management and performance oversight therefore continue to be central to the Authority's governance and decision-making framework, supporting effective intervention and the delivery of intended outcomes.

Principle E: Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

The Authority recognises that effective governance depends on clear leadership, organisational capacity and a skilled workforce. The Authority's Constitution defines the respective roles of elected Members and designated Officers, providing clarity around responsibilities, accountability and objectives. Designated statutory posts include the Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer and Monitoring Officer, ensuring appropriate professional leadership and statutory oversight.

Organisational capacity is further strengthened through regional and national collaboration. The three Welsh fire and rescue services participate in a range of joint arrangements, including the All-Wales Fire Investigation Training Forum, supporting shared learning, professional standards and a consistent approach across Wales.

The Authority has written and implemented the All-Wales FRS People and Organisational Development Strategy 2025–2028, which provides a strategic framework for workforce development and underpins the Authority's commitment to lifelong learning, professional competence and organisational resilience. This strategic approach to people development is complemented by the Authority's recognition of apprenticeship schemes as an important mechanism for building future capacity and capability. During 2025–26, apprentices were recruited into both firefighter and non-operational roles, supporting workforce sustainability, skills development and talent pathways across the organisation.

In recognition of the scale and complexity of longer-term transformation programmes, including the development of firefighter training facilities, the Service has established dedicated project management capacity. This supports effective delivery, governance oversight and organisational learning in relation to significant programmes of change.

Foundational capability is supported through structured induction arrangements for both Members and employees. Induction processes

introduce the organisation's core values, expected standards of conduct and role requirements, ensuring a consistent understanding of responsibilities from the outset.

The Authority also recognises the importance of maintaining workforce health and wellbeing as a key element of organisational capacity. Health and wellbeing support is provided through a range of measures, including HR policies and guidance, flexible working arrangements, access to occupational health services and an employee assistance programme. Strategic oversight of these arrangements is provided by People and Organisational Development Committee and the Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee.

Learning, training and professional competence are supported by a dedicated training department and established competency frameworks for operational staff. Training is delivered through a range of methods, including mandatory e-learning modules for key subject areas such as data protection. Governance oversight of learning and development arrangements is provided by the Organisational Learning Committee, ensuring alignment with national guidance and identified organisational risks.

During the year, the Authority approved a new three-year Training Strategy, which supports the continued development of workforce capability, leadership capacity and organisational competence as part of the Authority's governance and assurance framework. In addition, during 2025–26, the Authority continued to invest in leadership development at all levels of the organisation, with staff participating in nationally recognised supervisory, middle-management and senior leadership programmes. This investment supports leadership capability, management competence and organisational resilience.

Operational leadership capability has also been strengthened through continued development of incident command skills. Staff undertook Gold, Silver and Bronze incident command training, supporting effective leadership, command resilience and safe decision-making at incidents. More broadly, the development needs of employees are identified through an appraisal process, and organisational development is identified through an annual Training Needs Analysis process. The Service delivers structured training aligned to Incident Command Levels 1–4 to support confident, effective command in both operational and strategic contexts.

Professional standards are reinforced through membership of relevant professional bodies and the requirement for ongoing continuing professional development. Promotional processes are aligned to the National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) Leadership Framework, supporting consistency, fairness and alignment with national expectations.

The Authority also recognises the value of independent assurance and professional advice in strengthening organisational capability. During 2025–26, this included assurance and advisory support provided by the Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA) to inform improvement activity and support effective governance.

In line with the Welsh Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework 2026, the Authority recognises that effective people management, leadership development and a positive organisational culture are fundamental to good governance. These principles continue to underpin the Authority's approach to workforce planning, learning and organisational development.

Principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.

The Authority maintains a comprehensive framework of internal control and assurance to support effective risk management, financial stewardship and decision-making. Statutory responsibility for the proper administration of the Authority's financial affairs rests with the Treasurer, in accordance with [Section 151 Local Government Finance Act 1972](#), while the Monitoring Officer provides assurance that the Authority operates within the law and complies with established policies, procedures and regulatory requirements.

The Strategic Risk Management Policy sets out a structured approach to identifying, assessing and managing risks that may impact on the achievement of objectives. A corporate risk register is maintained by the Corporate Planning Department and reviewed throughout the year by the Strategic Risk Committee to ensure that risks are appropriately monitored, mitigated and escalated where necessary.

Decision-making is supported by comprehensive reporting and assurance arrangements. Reports presented to the Authority and its Committees are accompanied by an integrated impact assessment, enabling Members to consider legal, financial, equality, wellbeing, sustainability and operational implications when making decisions. Business continuity arrangements are also in place to ensure that critical services can continue to be delivered in the event of disruption. These arrangements are reviewed annually to maintain organisational resilience.

Independent scrutiny and assurance form a central part of the Authority's internal control framework. The Audit Committee provides oversight of governance, risk management and internal control arrangements, ensuring that recommendations for improvement arising from Internal Audit, Audit Wales and other external regulators or inspection are considered, agreed

and monitored to completion. Members and senior management are also provided with [quarterly reports](#) on service improvement and performance against key performance indicators and milestones, supporting transparency and continuous improvement.

Arrangements are in place to maintain [registers of Members' personal and business interests and a register of gifts and hospitality](#). These are published on the Authority's website as part of each Member's personal profile. Policies covering Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing further reinforce the Authority's commitment to operating in a fair, open and transparent manner. The Authority's Contract Procedure Rules form a key component of the internal control framework and support lawful, transparent and accountable procurement activity. During the year, further work was undertaken to strengthen compliance with procurement requirements and to embed fair working and partnership principles, including alignment with the Social Partnership Duty, as part of the Authority's wider governance and assurance arrangements.

Information governance arrangements support the secure and lawful handling of data. Policies in place include the Data Protection Policy, Freedom of Information Policy, Data Retention Policy and Communications and Information Security Policy. These arrangements are supported by staff training, including mandatory data protection e-learning for all employees, and by formally agreed information-sharing protocols with partner organisations.

Financial management arrangements support both the delivery of services and the implementation of transformational change, while ensuring sound stewardship of public resources. [A financial update](#) is presented at each Authority meeting, with [reports](#) made publicly available on the Authority's website to support transparency.

Internal Audit services are provided by the Mersey Internal Audit Agency (MIAA), which delivers a programme of risk-based audit activity approved by the Audit Committee. The outcomes of Internal Audit work undertaken during 2025–26, including audits relating to asset management, have informed the Authority's assessment of the effectiveness of its governance, risk management and internal control arrangements. The Head of Internal Audit provides an annual independent opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of these arrangements, which is a key source of assurance for the Authority. For the financial year 2025-26, the Head of Internal Audit opinion statement determined that “Substantial assurance can be given that there is a good system of internal control designed to meet the organisation's objectives, and that controls are generally being applied consistently”. A full

copy of the Head of Internal Audit's opinion will be published on the [Authority's website](#).

External assurance is provided by Audit Wales through a programme of financial and performance audit activity. This includes the audit of the [Authority's Statements of Accounts](#), work relating to compliance with the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, reviews undertaken under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, and assessment of the Authority's arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The findings from this work are reported to Members and inform the Authority's ongoing governance, performance and improvement arrangements. Treasury Management arrangements are operated in accordance with professional practice and are subject to annual Member review. The Authority's Statements of Accounts and performance against key areas of risk and priority are subject to independent external audit and scrutiny.

In line with the Welsh Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework 2026, the Authority recognises the importance of effective processes for identifying and evaluating risk. Risk management therefore continues to be a central element of the Authority's governance, internal control and assurance arrangements.

During 2025-26, Audit Wales also completed a review of the Authority's financial sustainability arrangements. The review recognised that the Authority had a clear understanding of its financial position and a relatively strong reserves position, whilst identifying opportunities to further strengthen medium and longer-term financial planning, the strategic use of reserves, financial reporting to Members, and clarity of financial oversight arrangements. The Authority has considered the findings and recommendations arising from this review and incorporated appropriate actions within its ongoing governance and improvement planning arrangements.

Principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability.

The Authority is committed to transparency, effective scrutiny and continuous improvement, supported by robust reporting and assurance arrangements. As part of this commitment, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, working jointly with Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, appointed Crest Advisory to undertake an independent cultural review. This followed the Welsh Government's acceptance, in March 2024, of a proposal from both Services to better understand progress in improving organisational culture.

The proposal formed the basis of a [written statement](#) by the then Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, Hannah Blythyn MS.

Crest Advisory conducted the review and published its findings [report](#) in February 2025, identifying 32 recommendations to support cultural improvement. In response, and throughout 2025–26, the Authority strengthened its governance and assurance arrangements through the establishment of a dedicated Culture Board. Chaired by the Chief Fire Officer, the Board brings together Authority Members, senior officers, culture champions and external representation from Welsh Government. The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority and the Service's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead are members of the Board. These arrangements provide structured scrutiny, external challenge and assurance over the delivery of agreed cultural improvement actions. A strategic improvement plan has been developed and published, setting out how the recommendations will be implemented and monitored.

More broadly, the Authority, with the support of the Monitoring Officer, undertakes regular review of the adequacy and effectiveness of its governance arrangements and internal control environment. [Fire and Rescue Authority meetings](#) are held in public, with agendas and minutes published on the Authority's website. Full Authority meetings are webcast, supporting openness and public access to decision-making and scrutiny. Reports presented to the Authority follow a structured format, ensuring that key information is presented clearly and consistently to support informed decision-making.

The Authority complies with the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, publishing information in accordance with its [publication scheme](#) and responding appropriately to requests from members of the public. Transparency of planning and performance is further supported through publication of the Community Risk Management Plan, which sets out the Authority's Improvement and Well-being Objectives and is subject to review by Audit Wales in connection with the issue of a Certificate of Compliance.

Financial transparency and accountability are supported through the timely production and publication of the Annual Statement of Accounts. The accounts are presented in a clear, user-friendly format, providing transparent information on income, expenditure and the stewardship of public funds, and are submitted for audit in line with statutory deadlines. The Authority also publishes an [Annual Pay Policy Statement](#) in accordance with the Localism Act 2011, and Members' salaries are paid and reported in line with determinations made by the Independent Remuneration Panel for Wales.

Arrangements are in place to ensure transparency in relation to interests and relationships. Members and senior officers are required to declare relevant interests in accordance with the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK. These declarations support the identification and disclosure of related party transactions where required.

The Authority provides external transparency through regular reporting to Welsh Government. Reports are submitted each January and July detailing matters relating to discipline, grievance and external complaints, including cases of alleged misconduct or gross misconduct where behaviours may raise concerns about organisational culture and values.

The Annual Governance Statement itself plays a key role in accountability, providing a transparent account of the Authority's governance arrangements, the review of governance effectiveness and planned governance improvement actions for the year ahead.

Independent assurance is provided through both external and internal audit. The Auditor General for Wales, appointed by statute, provides an opinion on the Authority's Statement of Accounts, which is published on the Authority's website. The Authority responds to audit recommendations and takes corrective action where required. Internal Audit operates on a risk-based approach, providing assurance that key risks and controls are being effectively managed. Following a review of internal arrangements, a new Internal Audit provider was appointed in June 2023 to further strengthen assurance arrangements. Processes are also in place to ensure that recommendations arising from inspection and regulatory bodies are tracked and implemented.

In line with the Welsh Government's Fire and Rescue National Framework 2026, the Authority recognises the importance of strong accountability, effective collaboration and robust scrutiny. These principles continue to underpin the Authority's approach to transparency, reporting and assurance, supporting public confidence and good governance.

Conclusion

During the year, the Authority has reviewed the effectiveness of its governance arrangements in line with the principles set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government, including the requirements and expectations set out in the May 2025 addendum. This review has considered the operation of the Authority's governance framework, risk management and internal control arrangements, alongside assurance derived from internal and external audit, performance reporting, regulatory activity and ministerial engagement.

The review has drawn on a wide range of sources of assurance, including the work of the Audit Committee, the outcomes of Internal Audit delivered by the Mersey Internal Audit Agency, external assurance provided by Audit Wales, performance and risk reporting to Members, and findings arising from independent reviews, including the Crest Advisory cultural review. The Authority has also taken account of compliance with statutory duties, including those relating to finance, governance, consultation, equality, Welsh language standards and social partnership.

Based on this review, the Authority has concluded that it has an effective framework of governance, risk management and internal control in place which is operating as intended and supporting the delivery of its objectives. The arrangements described within this Annual Governance Statement demonstrate that the Authority continues to behave with integrity, remains open and accountable, manages risk and performance appropriately, and provides effective leadership and oversight.

The review has also identified areas where governance arrangements could be further strengthened. In particular, during 2025–26 the Authority recognised the need to enhance governance and assurance arrangements in relation to organisational culture and the oversight of significant programmes and projects. In response, the Authority has taken proactive steps to strengthen arrangements, including the establishment of a Culture Board following the independent Crest Advisory review, and the planned further development of programme and project management governance during 2026–27.

The Authority is satisfied that these actions represent proportionate and appropriate responses and has set out clear improvement actions to further strengthen governance and assurance arrangements. These actions will be monitored through existing governance mechanisms, including the Service Leadership Team, the Audit Committee and the Authority itself, and progress will be reported as part of the Authority's ongoing performance and assurance framework.

Taking all of this into account, the Authority considers that the governance arrangements in place during the year were effective, and that appropriate plans are in place to address identified areas for improvement and to continue to enhance governance arrangements in line with good practice and national expectations.

How the Authority addressed its 2025/26 Governance Improvement Actions.

Governance Improvement Area	Planned Action	Forum	Responsibility	Progress as at April 2026
Efficacy of Prevention activities	Consider the findings and recommendations arising from Audit Wales review of Prevention.	Fire and Rescue Authority	Head of Prevention and Protection	During 2025-26, the Authority responded to the Audit Wales review of prevention activity by strengthening governance, oversight and assurance, and progressing a shift towards a more targeted, data-led and risk-informed prevention model, supported by enhanced performance reporting and national collaboration.
Setting of Wellbeing Objectives	Consider the findings and recommendations arising from Audit Wales review of well-being objective setting.	SLT Improvement Board	Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation	During 2025-26, the Authority strengthened its approach to setting well-being objectives by improving alignment with partner activity, enhancing involvement and equality considerations, and embedding objectives more clearly within corporate, financial and performance management frameworks. Further work will focus on making partnership contributions and outcome-based performance measures more explicit in future planning and reporting cycles.
Strategic Risk Management	Implement the recommendations from the Internal Audit review of Core Controls of Risk Management.	SLT Improvement Board	Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation	A revisit by Mersey Internal Audit Agency during 2025-26 found the Service made progress in strengthening its risk management framework, including approval of a Risk Management Strategy, clearer roles and responsibilities, enhanced training provision and improved governance arrangements. Further work is planned with a clear programme of actions in place, being progressed through established governance arrangements.

Organisational Culture	Respond to the recommendations of the CREST independent cultural review through staff and Fire and Rescue Authority engagement, culminating in the publication of an improvement plan.	Fire and Rescue Authority	Chief Fire Officer	During 2025-26, a Culture Action Plan was developed in response to the Crest Advisory review and is being implemented through strengthened governance, with progress subject to regular review and reporting via established internal and external oversight arrangements.
Efficacy of Response to Domestic Dwelling Fires	Respond to recommendations in the Chief Fire Advisor and Inspector for Wales' "Inspection of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service to consider the effectiveness of its response to domestic dwelling fires".	Fire and Rescue Authority	Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation	During 2025/26, governance of all CFRAIW thematic reviews was strengthened through the establishment of a dedicated oversight group, with clear reporting lines, a consolidated action plan, and enhanced all-Wales collaboration to support consistent implementation and improvement.
Supplier verification and Anti-fraud guidance	Respond to recommendations by the Internal Auditor in relation to Key financial processing controls 2024/25 including	Finance and Procurement Committee	Head of Finance	Supplier verification procedures have been strengthened, including enhanced checks before supplier set-up and update. Anti-fraud guidance has been updated, with an e-learning package now live and communicated to relevant finance and procurement staff.

	implementing Supplier Verification, Anti-Fraud Guidance and Regular Reviews of Bank Mandates.			A programme of periodic reviews of supplier bank details has been introduced to reduce fraud risk. Bank mandate has been updated.
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The Authority's Governance Improvement Actions 2026/27

Governance Improvement Area	Planned Action	Forum	Responsibility	For completion by
Alignment with emerging Welsh Government requirements	Prepare for potential future changes to Fire and Rescue Authority governance arrangements, aligned to emerging Welsh Government policy and guidance, including the Written Statement on the Governance of Fire and Rescue Services.	Fire and Rescue Authority	Chief Fire Officer and Clerk to the Fire Authority	31 st March 2027
Implementation of Fire and Rescue national framework 2026	Prepare for potential changes arising from the Fire and Rescue National Framework 2026, ensuring governance, planning and assurance arrangements remain aligned with emerging requirements.	Fire and Rescue Authority	Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation	31 st March 2027
National Inspection expectations	Maintain organisational readiness for potential inspection activity, including reviewing governance, performance management and assurance arrangements against emerging Welsh Government and national inspection expectations.	Fire and rescue Authority	Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation	31 st March 2027
Contaminants	Prepare for the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) inspection on contaminants, including reviewing and strengthening relevant controls, assurance and governance arrangements.	Health, Safety and Wellbeing committee	Head of Technical Operations	31 st March 2027
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	Strengthen governance and assurance arrangements for equality, diversity, inclusion and human rights, ensuring continued compliance with statutory duties and readiness for external scrutiny and inspection.	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion committee	Chief Fire Officer	31 st March 2027

Fire safety and Building Safety (Wales) act.	Prepare for and respond to changes in fire safety and building safety legislation, including the implementation of the Building Safety (Wales) Act, ensuring protection, governance and assurance arrangements remain effective and aligned.	Prevention, Protection and Performance Committee	Head of Prevention and Protection	31 st March 2027
Project & Programme Management	To continue to strengthen governance, oversight and internal controls in relation to programme and project management, ensuring effective assurance, reporting and delivery of key change initiatives.	Strategic Risk Committee	Head of Planning, Performance and Transformation	31 st March 2027

Compliance with the Financial Management Code

The CIPFA Financial Management Code (CIPFA FM Code) is designed to support good practice in financial management and to assist the Authority in demonstrating their financial sustainability. The CIPFA FM Code therefore sets the standards of financial management for the Authority.

The Code is based on a series of principles supported by specific standards and statements of practice which are considered necessary to provide the strong foundation to:

- Financially manage the short, medium- and long-term finances of the Authority
- Manage financial resilience to meet foreseen demands on services
- Financially manage unexpected shocks in their financial circumstances.

Each Authority must demonstrate that the requirements of the Code are being satisfied.

As Section 151 Officer I have the Statutory Responsibility (supported by the Service Leadership Team and Members of the Authority) for ensuring compliance with the CIPFA FM Code.

I have carried out a full assessment of compliance with the CIPFA FM Code as part of the annual review of the Annual Governance Statement and I can confirm that in my opinion the Authority is compliant with the code in the majority of areas.

Signed _____

(Section 151 Officer) 2026

Governance Opinion and Conclusion

The Authority recognises that good governance provides the foundation for the delivery of good quality services that meet the needs of stakeholders and ensures that public money is well spent. This review confirms the governance systems and monitoring in place for 2025-26 and the steps taken to ensure that they are working effectively.

The Authority is satisfied that appropriate governance arrangements are in place and remains committed to enhancing these through the implementation of the action plan for 2026-27.

Signed _____

(Authority Chair) 2026

Signed _____

(Chief Fire Officer) 2026



Awdurdod Tân ac Achub Gogledd Cymru
North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority