

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	21 July 2025
Lead Officer	Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officer	Anthony Jones, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Subject	Independent Cultural Review Update



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To present to Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) the draft Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan (SCIP) for approval and provide an update on progress to date on the cultural journey of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 On 5 February 2025, the report into the cultural review undertaken by Crest Advisory was published and was presented to the Executive Panel of the Authority on 17 March 2025. Since 17 March 2025, Crest Advisory have made presentations to Authority Members, to the Service Leadership Team, to Middle Leaders and at events open to all employees, as well as to Welsh Government officials on 11 March 2025.
- 3 This paper is a progress paper and presents the SCIP for approval.

OBSERVATIONS FROM EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 4 The Executive Panel examined the SCIP on 16 June 2025 and recommend it for the approval of the Fire and Rescue Authority.

RECOMMENDATION

- 5 It is recommended that Members:
 - i) **Approve the Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan; and**
 - ii) **note the next steps on the cultural journey of NWFRS.**

BACKGROUND

- 6 The Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan, whilst acknowledging progress has been made, targets issues such as a lack of accountability and transparency among some leaders. It proposes concrete steps to bolster trust, ensure fairness in recruitment and promotion, and invest in staff development.

- 7 This SCIP also aims to foster a diverse and inclusive workforce, improve health, safety, and wellbeing, and enhance the handling of misconduct and grievances to build on existing improvements and tackle remaining obstacles.
- 8 It aims to acknowledge that while the culture has improved since June 2021 with the appointment of the current Chief Fire Officer (CFO), negative behaviours among a minority of staff are still hindering positive change.

INFORMATION – ACTIONS COMPLETED TO DATE

- 9 Following extensive research, approval has been given by the Service Leadership Team (SLT) to start the roll out of 360 appraisals. This will begin with the SLT in July 2025.
- 10 The CFO met with Bron Biddle from the Association of Ambulance Chief Executives on 2 June 2025. The meeting was to explore, and subsequently agree, the delivery of a workshop entitled “The Wolf We feed.”
- 11 Forty senior and middle leaders received a full day of excellent “Discipline and Grievance” training funded by the Welsh Government.
- 12 The Service has re-let the contract for Occupational Health Services.
- 13 The Service has initiated a fact-finding mission to Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service, who have made significant progress on their own cultural journey and engaged an external cultural specialist on a 12-month contract. Of interest is the provision of a dashboard tool that can assist in tracking the progress of any cultural change implementation over a set period.
- 14 The SCIP was reviewed and discussed during the Middle Leader's Seminar held at Venue Cymru on 11 June 2025.
- 15 During the recent ACFO selection process, a stakeholder panel was established with all representative bodies invited to meet the shortlisted candidates.
- 16 Following the Emergency Cover Review process, a Collaborative Agreement has now been signed between the FBU and the Service, which seeks to improve rural fire cover and increase resilience. The Collective Agreement has also been approved by the FBU at regional and national levels.

17 A review of the Service's mental health absence and service provision was held at informal SLT on 18 June 2025, in addition to several policy reviews which support the SCIP to meet the recommendations of the report as follows:

- Complaints Management Policy
- Family-Friendly Leave
- Grievance Resolution Policy
- Menopause Policy
- Capability Policy
- Fostering Leave Procedure.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	Future Service provision could be impacted if the concerns highlighted by the review are not addressed
Budget	Currently within existing budgets
Legal	The Service is working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to ensure that it complies with its legal duties under the Equality Act 2010
Staffing	Nil
Equalities/Human Rights/ Welsh Language	Nil
Risks	The report identifies both positive improvements and causes for concern. The concerns must be addressed to ensure that the Service remains an employer of choice and can attract talent to provide quality services.