

Hannah Blythyn MS, Deputy Minister for Social  
Partnership

18 March 2024

Dear Deputy Minister,

## **Fire and Rescue Services inquiry: request for information**

Thank you for attending the Equality and Social Justice Committee on 26 February 2024 as part of our inquiry into governance arrangements of fire and rescue services in Wales. Since that session you have announced two further independent reviews into North Wales (NWFRS), and Mid and West Wales (MWWFRS), Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs). I would therefore welcome further clarification from you on the following.

### **Independent reviews into NWFRS and MWWFRS**

During our sessions with NWFRS and MWWFRS on 11 March 2024, both organisations acknowledged potential cultural issues within their services and an increase in complaints. You stated in your Written Statement on 11 March:

*"I continue to receive correspondence from current and former employees of both organisations, including allegations of bullying, sexual harassment and favouritism in promotion".<sup>1</sup>*

In response to the announcement, Roger Thomas, Chief Fire Officer of MWWFRS, said he welcomed "external scrutiny" of the Service's culture and that "we will embrace that and take that on board". On the other hand, the Chair of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority, Dylan Rees, said: "We welcome the announcement that there's going to be in an [sic] independent review, because we have nothing to hide. We welcome scrutiny and we believe it will show that we are making good progress in this area."<sup>2</sup>

1. What is your view on the contrasting nature of these statements? How would you respond to Mr Rees' claims?
2. For both reviews we would be grateful if you could please provide the following:
  - a. The terms of reference for the reviews and how they compare with the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS) culture review;

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government Written Statement, [Culture and values in Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service and North Wales Fire and Rescue Service](#), 11 March 2024

<sup>2</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, Record of Proceedings, [paragraphs 218 and 168](#), 11 March 2024

- b. Anticipated timescales for completion of the reviews;
- c. Confirmation of who will carry out the review and whether consideration has been given to appointing the same panel as carried out the culture review of SWFRS.

## Inspection and Audit

3. With regards to the current inspection regime in Wales, please could you outline what level of capacity there is currently to undertake regular and rigorous inspections? How often do inspections of FRSs take place?
4. How consideration is given to issues relating to the culture of a Fire and Rescue Service in the current inspection regime? What is the Welsh Government's view of changes to the inspection regime in England and what consideration has been given to adopting a similar inspection regime?

## Relationship between Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor and Inspector and FRA Chairs

During our session with current and former Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) chairs on 11 March 2024, Steven Bradwick told us that he would have welcomed an enhanced role for the Welsh Government including from the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser and Inspector for Wales:

*"The first time I ever met the adviser was in a social partnership meeting. I've never seen, when I've been in headquarters [...] I think part of the role could be enhanced by the Welsh Government, as they should meet with the chairs of fire authorities on a quarterly basis in HQ to sort things out, because I've never seen him when I've been there. [...] I've never had a one-to-one meeting with the adviser whatsoever, and I would welcome more of this collaboration, 100 per cent."*<sup>3</sup>

5. Please could you set out your expectations of the level of engagement between FRAs and the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser?
6. For each of the last three years, please could you also set out the level of engagement (please provide details of the type, duration and format of each engagement) that FRA Chairs have had with:
  - i. Welsh Government officials; and
  - ii. Welsh Government Ministers.

In our session on 26 February you also stated that in response to His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Fire and Rescue Services in England 2023 report you had written "to all FRA chairs back in May, indicating that even though that applied specifically to England, we would expect some learning points with some action from that here in Wales, and to make sure that the measures were at the very least as robust as those recommended."<sup>4</sup>

7. Please could you share with us a copy of this correspondence and the responses received from each of the fire and rescue services.

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<sup>3</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, Record of Proceedings, [paragraph 329](#), 11 March 2024

<sup>4</sup> Equality and Social Justice Committee, Record of Proceedings, [paragraph 20](#), 26 February 2024

## Training

8. Can you please outline who is responsible for training and induction of FRA members and what basic training is provided in terms of cultural issues such as equality, inclusion and diversity?

## The Social Partnership Forum

9. Please can you share with the Committee the membership, meeting agendas and minutes for the Social Partnership Forum and commit to sharing these with the Committee on an ongoing basis?

I look forward to hearing from you by 4 April 2024.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jenny Rathbone". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'J'.

Jenny Rathbone  
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee

