



Awdurdod Tân ac Achub
Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru
Mid and West Wales
Fire and Rescue Authority

Jenny Rathbone MS
Chair of the Equality and Social Justice Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Dyddiad /
Date: 04/03/2024

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your letter dated 12th February 2024.

I have pleasure in providing my written response to your request in support of my scheduled attendance at your inquiry into the Culture Review of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service on Monday 11 March 2024 at the Senedd.

As already confirmed, I will be supported at the Inquiry by the Chief Fire Officer of Mid & West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, Mr Roger Thomas.

Should you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours Sincerely,

Cllr Gwynfor Thomas

Chair of Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Authority
Cadeirydd o Awdurdod Tân ac Achub Canolbarth a Gorllewin Cymru

1. The extent governance arrangements contributed to the failings identified in the SWFRS culture review.

- 1.1 While Mid & West Wales Fire & Rescue Authority (MAWWFRA) is familiar with the general findings relating to Fire Authority Governance from within the South Wales Fire & Rescue Service (SWFRS) report, it is not familiar with the same level detail for which South Wales Fire & Rescue Authority (SWFRA) would have been aware of from its Officers. However, on a point of effective Fire Authority governance within a Welsh Fire & Rescue Service, I am encouraged by the views captured by Fennella Morris KC which indicated that SWFRA does have sufficient legal structures in place for effective governance of the Service in relation to issues of culture (Page 111) with evidence arising from recent decisions made by that Authority towards recommendations by the then present Chief Fire Officer (CFO).
- 1.2 In view of the limited level of detail available to MAWWFRA to provide a definitive perspective on this first question, it would be remiss of MAWWFRA not to set out some key factors relating to the effective governance arrangements for its own Fire & Rescue Authority (FRA). As captured within the Fire & Rescue National Framework for Wales 2016, Section 21(c) of the Act states that Fire and Rescue Authorities must have regard to the National Framework in carrying out their functions. I can confirm that MAWWFRA has and continues to deliver upon the Framework's aim which is *"to keep people, communities, businesses and the environment in Wales safe from fires and other hazards as effectively and efficiently as possible"*.
- 1.3 MAWWFRA effective governance arrangements can be evidenced from established adherence to the MAWWFRA Constitution made through its formal reporting and scrutiny structure comprising of the main Fire Authority meeting and its supporting Committees to include Resources Management Committee (RMC), Performance, Audit & Scrutiny Committee (PASC), Fire Authority Standards Committee as key examples. MAWWFRA reports contained therein are consistently comprehensive, providing MAWWFRA Members with the full understanding of the matter in hand enabling Members to scrutinise any matters with Officers accordingly. Such reports are complimented by reports received from both Internal and External auditors on a range of themes and these serve to provide Members with additional perspectives of the management arrangements and performance in place by the MAWWFRS.
- 1.4 As defined under Article 5 of the MAWWFRA Constitution, the MAWWFRA Chair and Deputy Chair are elected by MAWWFRA Members at the Annual General Meeting who then hold office for a period of two years, with the Deputy Chair following the Chair into Office. MAWWFRA have consistently rotated their Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs as MAWWFRA meeting records will attest.
- 1.5 On matters of culture and inclusion, MAWWFRA has been kept informed of the publication of His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Spotlight report titled 'Values and culture in fire and rescue services' and MAWWFRS response which has been closely followed with MAWWFRS own independent Staff Culture Survey, commissioned in 2022 and

reported in 2023, the results of which were presented to all staff, to MAWWFRA Members, Chief Fire & Rescue Adviser and Inspector for Wales (CFRAIW), Welsh Government (WG) and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA). In addition to the established Committees as defined by the MAWWFRA Constitution, the MAWWFRA is subject to a number of additional Corporate Planning (MAWWFRA Member and Officer) events led by the Chief Fire Officer and his Executive Leadership Team and these events are used to further inform MAWWFRA Members of important matters relating to the Service's local performance as well as wider sector specific issues such as the emergence of the culture and inclusion focus. The combination of the structured MAWWFRA meetings and the additional Corporate Planning events ensure that MAWWFRA Members are kept informed in the fullest of matters pertaining to the Service's delivery of service and providing additional opportunities for MAWWFRA Member scrutiny.

- 1.6 The Service actively encourages MAWWFRA member representation on a number of its groups and these include an Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Champion and a Health, Safety & Wellbeing Champion as examples, and these representatives allow for both an independent and MAWWFRA Member perspective to be obtained from their attendance.
 - 1.7 The role and function of the Fire Authority Standards Committee includes overseeing the Authority's 'whistle-blowing' procedure as well as to receive an annual report on the Authority's Compliments, Complaints and Comments procedure. Currently, a proposal is being made to the MAWWFRA Democratic Services Forum to include reports on historic misconduct cases to be presented and scrutinised by the MAWWFRA Scrutiny Panel.
 - 1.8 In accordance with the Fire Authority Constitution, all MAWWFRA Members are authorised to visit any service premises and a number of Members visit Fire Stations within their constituency and actively engage with Service staff present at such locations. These are also additional opportunities for Members to qualify matters reported formally into the Fire Authority and its Committees with front line staff.
- 2. The capacity and capability of FRAs to change the existing management structures and practices that have been identified as potential areas of concern, and their willingness to deliver cultural change.**
- 2.1 The Mid and West Wales Fire Services (Combination Scheme) Order 1995 established the Mid and West Wales Fire Authority. Part 2, Section 5 (Fire Brigade for combined area) Section 9 (Officers and Employees) sets out both the requirement and duty for the Authority to set out an establishment scheme and the appointment of Officers and Employees as they think necessary for the efficient discharge of their functions.
 - 2.2 Article 33 of the MAWWFRA Constitution relates to the Authority's Code of Corporate Governance and this sets out unequivocally the responsibility recognised by the Authority in leading by example in its decision making and other processes and actions, with Members and Officers acting in accordance with high standards of

conduct. This Article reflects the guidelines published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy / Society of Local Authority Chief Executives which are Openness and Inclusivity, Integrity and Accountability. The Authority's Code of Corporate Governance is a public statement of the commitment to these principles and sets out clearly the way in which this commitment is being, or will be, met.

2.3 Article 34 of the MAWWFRA Constitution relates to the Code of Conduct for Officers which sets out the expectation that the public is entitled to expect the highest standards of conduct from all employees who work for the Authority. This continues by citing that employees must act with integrity, respect, honesty, impartiality and objectivity, and that employees will be expected through agreed procedures and without fear of recrimination, to bring to the attention and appropriate level of management, any deficiency in the provision of the service.

2.4 MAWWFRA have been briefed on these specific matters in relation to their context for MAWWFRS. The potential areas of concern identified within the SWFRS Report which relate to existing management structures and practices, values and standards, leadership to include a performance review of the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and Restructure Corporate departments as examples, are not areas of change that are observed to be required from within MAWWFRS based upon the performance and conduct reported into MAWWFRA to date.

2.5 Indeed, the professional engagement coupled with the high degree of openness, transparency and effectiveness between MAWWFRA and the Chief Fire Officer and his Executive Leadership Team is commendable. It would be remiss of this response not to reflect that there will always be aspects of negativity present in every organisational employment area, however, from the evidence that has been presented to the MAWWFRA through its structured meetings and the ensuing scrutiny which has been applied, I am of the opinion that there are strong and effective management arrangements within MAWWFRS which sets it apart from the other two Welsh Fire & Rescue Services and specifically in regard to what has been highlighted within the SWFRS report.

2.6 In the event that MAWWFRA is required to invoke changes to the existing management structures and practices as a result of potential areas of concern, as Chair of MAWWFRA under Article 5 of the MAWWFRA Constitution my role is to hold Officers to account by means of the decision making and scrutiny structures of the Authority when appropriate.

3. The failure of previous attempts at reform including exploring the barriers that prevented implementation of previous reviews, specifically the Commission of Public Service Governance and Delivery, which called for the reconstitution of FRAs?

3.1 MAWWFRA recognises that a number of the recommendations identified in the 2014 Commission of Public Service Governance and Delivery were captured in the 2016

Fire & Rescue National Framework (Wales), setting out the Welsh Government's vision and priorities for FRAs in Wales. It describes what the Welsh Government expects of the FRAs and creates the foundation on which to build and promote improvement, efficiency and innovation.

- 3.2 MAWWFRA has always been and continues to support the need for reform where it enhances the provision of service to the communities and citizens in which it serves.
- 3.3 MAWWFRS sets out high standards in the delivery of its services and has been at the forefront of broader collaborative work with the two other Fire and Rescues Services in Wales as well as with the wider blue light and public sectors within Wales.
- 3.4 MAWWFRA has continually engaged with Welsh Government (Fire Branch) on areas of continuous improvement, these range from reducing incidents of fire, responding to emergencies, firefighter safety, preventative work within the community and supporting Welsh Ambulance Service NHS Trust on Medical response. These areas of reform are a mixture of statutory and non-statutory functions for which MAWWFRS has been actively engaged with WG throughout.
- 3.5 MAWWFRA have continually requested a position update from WG upon their proposal to publish a revised Fire & Rescue Services Framework for Wales and to date, the revised Framework remains unpublished. As a result, MAWWFRA has continued to operate within the current statutory framework until such time a new framework is published.
- 3.6 MAWWFRA has fully engaged with the CFRAIW at every opportunity and contributed to the Thematic Reviews (TR) which have arisen as a result.
- 3.7 In relation to matters pertaining to broadening the firefighter role, progress on this on the whole has not progressed at either a regional or national government level. MAWWFRA continues to show a proactive approach through its undertaking of Fire Medical Response at a local level; the only Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) in Wales to do so.

4. How the Welsh Government's 2018 consultation on reform of fire and rescue services has shaped current governance arrangements and working practices. The extent to which Welsh Government acted on concerns identified through this consultation and its 2019 progress report.

- 4.1 MAWWFRA provided a comprehensive response to the 2018 consultation however it has not seen clear evidence of how the responses have shaped current governance arrangements relating to the FRA.
- 4.2 As already mentioned, MAWWFRA has fully engaged on 'Thematic Reviews' led by the CFRAIW although these have focussed on operational managerial arrangements as opposed to a focus on fire authority governance reform.

- 4.3 MAWWFRA has fully engaged with Audit Wales on its current project titled 'Governance in Fire and Rescue Authorities'. This participation has been at both a Fire Authority Member and Officer level through a series of interviews and MAWWFRA awaits the findings due to be published in 2024.
- 4.4 MAWWFRS have recently reviewed its response to non-domestic property fire alarms in line with the findings arising from the June 2023 Audit Wales review into 'False Fire Alarm Reduction - Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority'. These findings have resulted in a revised response to fire alarms procedure for non-domestic premises within MAWWFRA which will take effect from May 2024. MAWWFRA have been fully informed of this procedural change by MAWWFRS Officers.
- 5. The changes needed to strengthen current arrangements for inspection and audit, including the role of external bodies including the Auditor General for Wales.**
- 5.1 MAWWFRA are unclear on what mandate this proposal is being made upon. Existing arrangements of inspection through the CFRAIW while not the same model as in English FRS remains an opportunity for further enhancement as defined in the CFRAIW terms of reference.
- 5.2 MAWWFRA are familiar with the role of the Auditor General for Wales as evidenced in this submission and will continue to support their work where it relates to MAWWFRA and the ongoing improvement of enhancing services for its communities and citizens.
- 6. The effectiveness of mechanisms for ensuring that evidence collected through inspections and reviews of FRSs by the Chief Fire Adviser and Inspector for Wales is used and acted upon and the arrangements for shared learning from inspections of FRSs undertaken in other UK nations, specifically in England, to inform policy.**
- 6.1 MAWWFRA is updated through its established committees on matters pertaining to existing performance and continuous improvement. An example of this is the current training and development review which has been commissioned as a MAWWFRS corporate project and aims to conduct a root and branch review of the existing practices around the training and development of risk critical, leadership and management skills. It pays cognisance to the work of the CFRAIW and has incorporated the outcomes of those thematic review outcomes into its base terms of reference.
- 6.2 MAWWFRS has a clear mandate to benchmark and align its current operating arrangements with new and emerging National Operational Guidance (NOG) and the ensuing National Operation Learning (NOL) that arises as a result. All of which strives MAWWFRS to achieve and maintain the highest level of operational safety and performance in its delivery of service.