

## South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Annual audit summary 2019-20

This is our audit summary for South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority. It shows the work completed since the last Annual Improvement Report 2018-19 which was issued on 24 July 2019.

Our audit summary forms part of the Auditor General for Wales' duties.

More information about these duties can be found on our [website](#).



### About the Fire and Rescue Authority

#### Some of the services the Fire and Rescue Authority provides



#### Key facts

Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) consist of nominated elected members, representing the local authorities across the FRA area as a whole.

South Wales FRA is made up of 24 councillors who represent their constituent authorities and the following political parties:

- Labour 16
- Conservative 2
- Independent 4
- Plaid Cymru 1
- Liberal Democrat 1

The FRA spent £71.87 million on providing services during 2019-20 which is a 2% increase on 2018-19.

As at 31 March 2020, the FRA had £3 million of cash reserves and £9.42 million in earmarked reserves.

## Key facts

FRA's have a statutory obligation under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to maintain a Fire and Rescue Service capable of dealing effectively with all calls for assistance in the case of fire and other emergencies.

The Welsh Government has overarching responsibility for determining policy on FRA's. At a local level, FRA's must meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, as well as the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services.

Most of the funding for the three FRA's in Wales is received by way of a levy from the local unitary authorities within their area. The contribution is based on population numbers.

## The Auditor General's duties

### We complete work each year to meet the following duties

- **Audit of Accounts**

Each year the Auditor General audits the FRA's financial statements to make sure that public money is being properly accounted for.

- **Value for money**

The FRA has to put in place arrangements to get value for money for the resources it uses, and the Auditor General has to be satisfied that it has done this.

- **Continuous improvement**

The FRA also has to put in place arrangements to make continuous improvements, including related plans and reports, and the Auditor General has to assess whether the FRA is likely to (or has) met these requirements.

- **Sustainable development principle**

Public bodies need to comply with the sustainable development principle when setting and taking steps to meet their well-being objectives. The Auditor General must assess the extent to which they are doing this.



Since the Spring of 2020, the ongoing pandemic has affected our audit work. We recognise the huge strain on public services and have reshaped our work programme, and found new ways of working to reduce its impact on public bodies' response to COVID-19, while still meeting our statutory duties.



**To meet the Auditor General's duties we complete specific projects, but we also rely on other audit work, and the work of for instance the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor for Wales. We take the findings of our audit work into account when assessing whether the Authority has put in place arrangements to secure value for money. Our findings and conclusions are summarised below.**

## What we found

### Audit of South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's 2019-20 Accounts

Each year we audit the FRA's financial statements.

#### For 2019-20:

- The Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the FRA's financial statements on 29 September 2020.
- The FRA's Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report were prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant guidance. They were consistent with the financial statements prepared by the Authority and with our knowledge of the FRA.
- The key matters arising from the accounts audit were reported to the FRA in the Audit of Financial Statements report on 28 September 2020.
- Our Audit of South Wales FRA's assessment of 2019-20 performance was issued on 10 December 2020.
- The Auditor General issued the certificate confirming that the audit of accounts for 2019-20 has been completed.

## Well-being of Future Generations Examination – Review of Involvement

The examination that we undertook in 2019-20 reviewed the FRA's approach and management of involving stakeholders when proposing service and policy changes, and in the design of activities. We undertook a more detailed look at:

- how the FRA is involving stakeholders in developing the new Strategic Equality Plan 2020-2025; and
- in planning public engagement events such as fire station open days, the United Kingdom Rescue Organisation (UKRO) event in 2018 and joint Emergency Services event in 2019.

We conclude that the FRA is good at involving partners and communities but needs to strengthen its evaluation to demonstrate the positive impact of its work. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

## Continuous improvement

The Auditor General certified that the FRA has met its legal duties for improvement planning and reporting and believes that is likely to meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 during 2020-21.

## Other Inspectorates

The Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor for Wales carried out a thematic review on the extent to which the Welsh Fire and Rescue Services have taken action to address the Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations. Publication is due in February 2021.

## Planned performance audit work for 2020-21

Our local performance audit work is ongoing. A review of Corporate Resilience was undertaken in November 2020 and we will share a draft of the report in early 2021.

## Local Government Studies

As well as local work at each FRA, each year we also carry out studies across the local government sector to make recommendations for improving value for money. Since the last annual improvement report we have published the following reports. See [Audit Wales Publications](#).

## Review of Public Services Boards (October 2019)

We inspected how Public Services Boards are operating; looking at their membership, terms of reference, frequency and focus of meetings, alignment with other partnerships, resources and scrutiny arrangements. We concluded that Public Services Boards are unlikely to realise their potential unless they are given freedom to work more flexibly and think and act differently. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

## **Progress in implementing the Violence Against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (November 2019)**

We examined how the new duties and responsibilities of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act are being rolled out and delivered. We found that victims and survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence are often let down by an inconsistent, complex and fragmented system. The full report is [here](#).

## **Rough Sleeping in Wales – Everyone’s Problem; No One’s Responsibility (July 2020)**

We looked at how well public services are responding to the issue of rough sleeping. Overall, we found that responding to COVID-19 is an opportunity for public bodies to start addressing long standing weaknesses in partnership working which has stopped them from tackling rough sleeping in the past. The report can be viewed [here](#).

## **Better Law Making (September 2020)**

This report draws on five reports published between 2019 and today looking at how local authorities are responding to the challenge of implementing new legislation. Implementation is a complex task which needs to be fully thought through by the Welsh Government and the Senedd whenever they bring forward and make any new legislation. The paper highlights the difficulties faced by local authorities and their public sector partners in implementing their new responsibilities. The report can be viewed [here](#).

## **Commercialisation in Local Government (October 2020)**

Councils have conducted commercial activity for a long time, and many councils are exploring additional commercial opportunities to mitigate against the financial pressures they face. Our report is specifically targeted at helping elected members and senior officers to examine and judge the potential impact on their organisations when considering whether to undertake commercialisation. It will also help councils to demonstrate how well they are discharging their value for money responsibilities. The report can be viewed [here](#).

The Auditor General is independent of government, and is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. The Auditor General undertakes his work using staff and other resources provided by the Wales Audit Office, which is a statutory board established for that purpose and to monitor and advise the Auditor General. The Wales Audit Office is held to account by the Senedd.

The Auditor General audits local government bodies in Wales, including unitary authorities, police, probation, fire and rescue authorities, national parks and community councils. He also conducts local government value for money studies and assesses compliance with the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.

Beyond local government, the Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Senedd Commission and National Health Service bodies in Wales.

Audit Wales is the non-statutory collective name for the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office, which are separate legal entities with their own legal functions, as described above. Audit Wales is not a legal entity.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

This document is also available in Welsh.