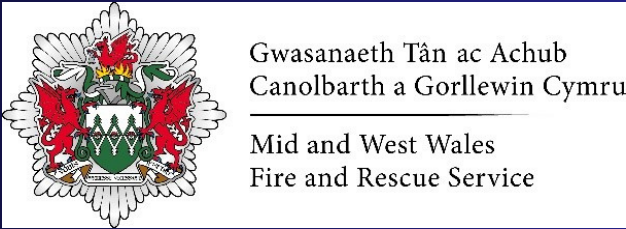


# ARE WE READY TO DO MORE, BETTER, WITH LESS?

Legal, Technological and Economic factors for Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service in 2023



## Doing More: The Legal Factor

The vision of the Welsh Government for Welsh Fire Services is set out in accordance with the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 in a National Framework, last published in 2016.

Success of fire prevention work done by the three Welsh services is celebrated. With reduced fire callouts, benefits of broadening the firefighter role is increasingly recognised.

The Fire and Rescue National Framework 2016 captures the overall purpose of Fire and Rescue Services in Wales now as:

**“To keep people, communities, businesses and the environment safe from fires and other hazards as effectively and efficiently as possible”**

This statement is broad and open ended, and recognises the changing world we are operating in. Rather than being an emergency service there primarily to provide a rescue response, the Welsh Government envisages a fire and rescue service that participates with other agencies in a much more holistic service for community wellbeing.

This vision for Welsh Fire and Rescue Services is also underpinned by the 2015 Wellbeing of Future Generations Act, which also demands a holistic consideration of the wider impact of the organisational activity of those public bodies that come under the legislation.

Following the 2016 Fire and Rescue National Framework, further developments for broadening the role of firefighters has been published in a Cabinet Statement (Blythyn, 2021), giving further details on the scope and capacity of fire and rescue services to accommodate broader responsibilities.

In this environment of changing roles MAWWFRS needs to ensure the infrastructure is there to support current staff to adapt, both technically and culturally, and to ensure that we know what skills we have, and what skills we need in new recruits joining the Service, and how attraction and selection processes might need to diversify in order to capture a broader spectrum of skills. The Service might also need to ensure that the expectations of new applicants are understood and managed if necessary.

## Doing it Better: The Technological Factor

The pace of technological development and the variety of applications being explored by humanity at present create the potential for a future within this century that is so different from our current reality that it is impossible to imagine (Taylor and Perkins, 2021, pp. 58-59)

An organisation that does not adapt to technological advances risks losing out on efficiencies; being out compete by rival organisations; undermining workers’ wellbeing and performance (CIPD, 2022).

The CIPD suggests that with the adoption of new technology, an organisation has to have a clear understanding of what is to be achieved through the change, which also requires an appreciation of the wider operational context. (CIPD, 2022, Stage 1).

As outlined above, the operational context of MAWWFRS has been, and continues to evolve through a broadening of the definition of the function of a firefighter, and by extension, the function of the organisation itself. For HR, this raises questions around recruitment - are the processes fit for purpose as the organisation adapts to wider requirements? Is the support staff recruitment process suitable to attract the best talent?

Attraction is crucial, both for operational and support roles, particularly in the more rural parts of Wales due to talent being drawn to locations where there are better opportunities (Jones, 2004; BBC, 2019). With a headquarters in Carmarthen, MAWWFRS is competing for talent that might equally be drawn to greater choice of employment opportunities in Swansea or Cardiff.

In this context, an understanding of opportunities lost through outdated recruitment processes, as well as the greater possibilities made available via more advanced technology, including the possibilities generated by artificial intelligence, to assist with slicker recruitment and on-boarding, to streamline processes and focus on the applicant experience, as well as providing better data for analysis, to further demonstrate and explore even more efficient ways of working to benefit the HR department and the Service as a whole.

# Doing it With Less: The Economic Factor

Welsh Fire and Rescue authorities set out their funding requirements and set a levy on local authorities (Wales Audit Office, 2018, p. 36)

The National Fire and Rescue Framework (Welsh Government, 2016, p. 21) requires that Fire and Rescue Authorities must maintain “downward pressure on costs and taking all opportunities to realise efficiencies”.

Published in 2016, the National Fire and Rescue Framework forecasts that public finances will remain under “severe pressure” for at least a further decade.

Since that publication the economic landscape has been impacted by events that could not have been predicted, including the COVID-19 pandemic, political turbulence affecting economic markets and the cost of living crisis and rising inflation in 2022-3.

According to media reporting, the agreed 2023-24 budget for MAWWFRS was increased by 13% on the previous year (Youle, 2023). The BBC reported that this was requested by MAWWFRS’ Chief Fire Officer to help address the decline within the On-call sector of the Service (Scourfield, 2022).

While Fire Authorities have the benefit of setting their own budgets through the levy arrangement, it is incumbent upon them to understand the impact of their levy amount on local authorities (i.e. money allocated to the Fire Service will be money that cannot then be allocated to other services.) (National Fire an Rescue Framework, 2016, p. 22).

Tax cuts announced in the 2023 Autumn Statement are likely to have an impact of budgets for public spending, which will in tern affect Local Authority budgets in Wales.

For MAWWFRS, the potential consequences of all these elements is that any further request for increase in the levy put upon Local Authorities is likely to be unwelcome or impossible, due to the required consideration on Local Authority budgets, and the likely media and public backlash, following the significant increase in budget in the 2023-24 financial year. Consequently, the economic outlook for the Service will require greater innovation, greater efficiency and greater resilience.