



Gwasanaeth Tân ac Achub
Fire and Rescue Service

Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan

*ATAL AMDDIFFYN YMATEB
PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING*

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Introduction and Background

This strategic cultural improvement plan for North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS) has been created to focus on the cultural challenges identified in the recent cultural review report commissioned by NWFRS and delivered by CREST. While acknowledging progress, this improvement plan targets issues like 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. This improvement plan 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.

This improvement plan acknowledges that while the culture has improved since June 2021 with the appointment of the current Chief Fire Officer, negative behaviours among a minority of staff are still hindering positive change.



Key Objectives

1. The primary objective of this plan is to create a more transparent, accountable, diverse, and supportive workplace, where all recommendations are fully implemented and have become “business as usual.”
2. To deliver on the areas for improvement that were identified via the main CREST report, and the subsequent departmental focus group meetings, and staff suggestion scheme.
3. To utilise SMART objectives to identify actions to meet these improvement recommendations
4. To clearly identify who will be responsible for implementing the plan to address the recommendations.
5. To regularly monitor the plan at strategic level, making any necessary adjustments as part of an ongoing strategic review process.



Key Strategic Themes

Bolstering Accountability and Building Trust

Issue: The CREST report identified an absence of accountability for past misconduct, avoidant leadership, poor decision-making, lack of transparency, and scepticism about senior leaders' commitment to cultural improvement.

Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan:

- We will consciously **lead cultural change** by example, embodying openness, accountability, and humility in accordance with the recent apologies for past behaviours issued by the Chief Fire Officer
- We will appoint a Performance and Monitoring Officer role and consult with an independent culture change implementation specialist to investigate the use of 360 appraisals for managers at all levels including SLT members, and the use of cultural champions.
- We will publicise this live '**cultural improvement plan**' with links into progress against the recommendations, inviting Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) members to take a more active role.
- We will review existing policies that deal with complaints, discipline, and grievance, considering exit interviews in order to ensure they are fair, reflect our diverse workforce and are transparent where appropriate.

Ensuring Recruitment, Promotion and Transfer are Fair and Transparent

Issue: The CREST report identified concerns about perceived overreach and lack of transparency in positive action, fuelling doubts about fairness (particularly for women), perceived bias in promotions, and need for greater transparency in transfers.

Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan:

- We will clearly set out NWFRS's approach to positive action in a public policy, focusing on recruitment and selection to improve staff and the public's understanding of the importance of workforce diversity and how positive action supports.
- We will improve how we publicise and share successes from positive action, highlighting outcomes like increased diversity.
- We will review all existing promotional policies (including transfers) to ensure quality feedback and a robust evaluation process that considers independent quality assurance of all promotion and transfer decisions.

Investing in Every Individual's Development

Issue: Perceived gaps in training (including people management) and scarce investment in non-operational ('Green book') staff development compared to operational staff

Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan:

- We will review and look to improve "Green book" development pathways, incorporating staff feedback, highlighting horizontal progression, and current and accredited prior learning qualifications.
- We will review the appraisal policy and procedures for staff, which will consider continued professional development (including potential short-term detachments or job swaps with other services) and a system to track development requests following appraisals.
- We will deliver targeted training to managers on identifying and responding to welfare concerns, including mental health, neurodiversity, and work-life balance.

Fostering a Diverse and Inclusive Workforce

Issue: Tensions around diversity initiatives, a narrow public image of firefighters, need for increased diversity of thought/experience, and need to embed the Core Code of Ethics

Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan:

- We will review our Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) training content and delivery based on staff feedback and any recommendations from the All Wales People and Organisational Development Group (PODG) to include mandatory training on neurodiversity, violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (VAWDASV)
- We will review operational competencies, and succession plans for senior roles (Strategic Manager/Area Manager and above) to potentially open senior roles to a more diverse group including those without firefighting experience.
- We will put in place a reverse mentoring scheme to reduce hierarchy barriers for improvement.
- We will review our EDI Impact Assessments, EDI data gathering and the Core code of ethics to ensure they meet both our legal requirements and workforce expectations.



Improving Health, Safety and Wellbeing

Issue: Concerns about health and safety (linked to auditing changes and disbanding PSS department), insufficient focus/capacity for safeguarding, inconsistent support for staff on long-term mental health leave, and concern about retaliation against those who speak up

Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan:

- We will complete a review of health and safety arrangements, looking at trends before and after the disbanding of PSS.
- We will review our safeguarding policy, related demand, capacity, and staff training and understanding of when and how to raise safeguarding concerns.
- We will continue to highlight and champion support roles such as Blue Light Champion/Colleague Support roles.
- Improve the management of staff returning from long-term absence with clearer structure and HR/department involvement.
- We will continue to ensure a confidential way for staff to raise concerns (Safe-Call) and raise awareness of whistleblowing processes, reviewing support for those who have raised concerns and ensuring any learning is shared where appropriate.



Improving Misconduct and Grievance Handling

Issue: Underreporting, insufficient/inconsistent responses, systemic avoidance, and lack of transparency about outcomes leading to a culture of impunity and perceptions of behaviour going unpunished Potential disproportionality in proceedings

Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan:

- We will ensure the Implementation of best practice such as NFCC fire standards on staff disclosure, complaints, grievance handling, misconduct allegations and outcomes handling, including conducting investigations regardless of staff leaving, and considering immediate dismissal in line with employment law.
- We will continue to employ subject matter experts in order to ensure misconduct allegations are managed consistently and legally utilising a case management system, whilst looking to continually develop, train and diversify investigators, FRA members and panels as appropriate.
- We will continue to revert to an external supplier for mediation processes, to ensure consistency and legal compliance.
- We will review our Grievance and Disciplinary data to identify trends, including potential disproportionality (e.g., related to Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff), and report to Welsh Government in compliance with the appropriate legislation.
- We will Implement a process for sharing learning from misconduct cases while preserving confidentiality.

Insert link to table of more detailed actions to address the recommendations based on the departmental objectives template which clearly identifies who is responsible/by when, (SMART) objectives etc.

