

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	19 October 2026
Lead Officer	Chief Fire Officer, Dawn Docx
Contact Officer	
Subject	Wildfire Activity Report - Summer 2026



PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1 To provide Members with assurance on the significant wildfire activity experienced across North Wales during summer 2026, the operational and multi-agency response, the effect on communities and resources, and the priorities for future preparedness and resilience.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2 From 12 July 2026, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) responded to multiple significant wildfires, including major incidents at Conwy Mountain near Capelulo and in the Rhinogydd mountains near Harlech. A major incident was declared because of simultaneous incidents and the potential effect on service delivery. The Conwy Mountain fire affected approximately 230 acres and required a sustained response for more than 48 hours, while the Rhinogydd fire affected approximately 2,000 acres and required a significant multi-agency response over almost two weeks.
- 3 Crews worked in remote and difficult terrain, using natural and constructed firebreaks, specialist wildfire resources and prolonged ground operations. At Conwy Mountain, 36 properties were evacuated as a precaution and residents later returned safely. At Rhinogydd, aerial support was secured through Natural Resources Wales when a suitable aircraft became available. The response was supported by partner agencies and mutual aid from Mid and West Wales and South Wales Fire and Rescue Services.
- 4 The incidents demonstrated the professionalism and resilience of firefighters, officers, control room staff, support teams, volunteers and partners, while also reinforcing the significance of prevention, training, specialist equipment, welfare, national resilience and aerial support arrangements.

- 5 Organisational learning and the full financial effect continue to be assessed through established governance and budget monitoring arrangements.

OBSERVATIONS FROM EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

- 6 This paper was presented to the Executive Panel on 21 September 2026. In response to a question about the financial impact, ACFO MacArthur advised Members that indicative costs were currently estimated at approximately £500,000, although final figures had not yet been confirmed. Members were informed that the Welsh Government Emergency Assistance Scheme had been opened, and a claim would be submitted for eligible costs.
- 7 Concerns around deliberate starting of fires were expressed and Members welcomed the proposed UK and Welsh Wildfire Summits due in October 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

- 8 It is recommended that Members:
- i. **Note the scale and impact of the summer 2026 wildfire activity;**
 - ii. **Recognise the contribution of Service personnel, partner agencies, volunteers and local communities; and**
 - iii. **Support continued work to capture learning, strengthen wildfire prevention and resilience, to reflect emerging operational and financial requirements in future planning.**

BACKGROUND

- 9 The Service's risk landscape is changing. Prolonged periods of hot, dry and windy weather are increasing the likelihood that grass and vegetation fires will develop into complex incidents requiring sustained resources. The summer incidents occurred alongside normal emergency response activity and generated significant public, media and political interest.
- 10 A major incident at Conwy Mountain was declared on 12 July and stood down once resources could manage the remaining activity through normal arrangements. Firefighters remained in attendance to monitor conditions and manage hotspots. The Rhinogydd incident developed across remote mountainous terrain near Cwm Bychan Lake, where access by vehicle and on foot was severely limited and the fire threatened areas of forestry and protected habitat.

INFORMATION

- 11 The operational response required specialist wildfire tactics, narrow access vehicles, incident command support, relief crews and sustained attendance. At Conwy Mountain, crews used natural and additional firebreaks to contain a fire front initially reported at around 1,600 metres. The position improved sufficiently for evacuated residents to return home on 13 July, although smoke and smouldering continued and the site was actively monitored for flare-ups.
- 12 At Rhinogydd, firefighters worked closely with Natural Resources Wales to establish and strengthen firebreaks, dampen hotspots and protect surrounding forestry and environmentally sensitive land. The scale and inaccessibility of the site meant that ground operations continued for an extended period. Thirty-six Service crews were involved at Rhinogydd and 22 crews responded to Conwy Mountain over the course of the incidents.
- 13 Strategic and Tactical coordination arrangements supported joint decision-making and the allocation of specialist resources. Natural Resources Wales provided specialist personnel, land-management expertise and heavy machinery. Aerial support was requested through established arrangements and, after availability was affected by high national demand, a helicopter was deployed to assist work in hard-to-reach areas. Aerial assets supported, rather than replaced, the coordinated work of firefighters and partners on the ground.
- 14 Mutual aid from Mid and West Wales and South Wales Fire and Rescue Services helped maintain resilience. Public communications consistently asked people to avoid affected areas, follow road closures and smoke advice, and report visible fire. Residents affected by smoke were advised to remain indoors with windows and doors closed until conditions improved. Support from the Public and the patience of local communities enabled safe operations.
- 15 The Corporate Communications Team maintained regular incident updates and supported the provision of many media interviews and stakeholder briefings. Messages recognised the work of crews and partners, explained the operational value and limitations of aerial support, and avoided speculation about fire causation while investigations continued. The incidents attracted national attention and strengthened the case for a coordinated Wales-wide conversation on wildfire prevention, preparedness and response.

- 16 Prevention remains the most effective means of reducing harm. Public advice focused on avoiding open fires and disposable barbecues, disposing of smoking materials responsibly, taking litter and glass home, staying away from incident grounds and calling 999 promptly from a safe place.
- 17 The incidents provide a substantial evidence base for structured organisational and multi-agency learning. Priority areas include welfare and relief arrangements during prolonged deployments, access to specialist resources, aerial support assurance, incident command, fire control resilience, mutual aid, communications, equipment, training and prevention. The learning should inform operational guidance, exercises and future capability decisions.
- 18 The incidents also reinforce the strategic importance of realistic training and command excellence. Firefighters increasingly need to prepare for large-scale wildfires, flooding and emerging technology risks. Hwb Awen remains relevant to that future capability, although any progression continues to be subject to its separate business case, funding and governance arrangements.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	The response supported resilient and cohesive communities by protecting life, homes, businesses, infrastructure, agriculture, wildlife and the natural environment. Prevention and partnership activity also support long-term community resilience and the sustainable development principle.
Budget	The incidents generated additional employee, overtime, retained duty, fuel, catering, welfare, vehicle, equipment, consumable and PPE costs. The full financial effect is still being quantified through budget monitoring, and officers are engaging with Welsh Government regarding potential support through the Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme. No additional funding decision is sought through this report.
Legal	The response was delivered through North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's (the Authority) statutory emergency response and civil contingencies responsibilities. No separate legal decision is required by this report.
Staffing	The prolonged incidents placed significant operational and personal demands on firefighters, officers, fire control and support functions, including many on-call firefighters balancing Service duties with other work and family commitments. Welfare, recovery, competence and resilience requirements will be considered through the review process.
Equalities / Human Rights / Welsh Language	Public information was provided through official channels and should continue to be accessible and bilingual. Future prevention and preparedness work should consider the needs of people affected by smoke, evacuation, rural isolation, disability, health conditions, language and digital exclusion.
Risks	Wildfire remains a significant and evolving strategic risk. Key exposures include simultaneous incidents, prolonged resource commitment, difficult terrain, limited specialist aircraft availability, firefighter welfare, environmental loss, disruption to communities and financial pressure. Mitigation depends on prevention, trained people, appropriate equipment, robust command and control, mutual aid, resilient partnerships, evidence-led aerial support and systematic learning from significant incidents.