

Report to	North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority
Date	19 October 2026
Lead Officer	Dawn Docx, Chief Fire Officer
Contact Officers	Elin Hughes and Tom Weston, Culture Champ
Subject	Cultural Champions Update Report – 12-month update



PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. To provide the Fire Authority with an overview of progress made through the Culture Champion activity and the arrangements established to sustain culture improvement following the CREST Cultural Review.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. The Culture Champion secondments were established in September 2025 to support the Service's response to the CREST Cultural Review. Over the last 12 months, the role has developed from establishing engagement mechanisms and assurance processes into a broader organisational improvement and assurance function, connecting staff voice, leadership, people processes', governance and organisational performance. This has enabled culture improvement activity to move from implementation planning towards measuring impact and embedding sustainable arrangements across the Service.
3. Key achievements include:
 - Monitoring the 28 actions within the Strategic Culture Improvement Plan across six themes, with 14 actions completed and embedded into business as usual by September 2026, with ongoing oversight transferred to relevant action owners.
 - Development and implementation of Culture Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to strengthen monitoring, accountability and organisational assurance.
 - Development and implementation of a two-phase Culture Dashboard, improving transparency of actions and ownership and supporting the integration of KPIs and outcome monitoring.
 - Establishment of direct and recurring routes for staff voice through the Culture Champion mailbox and Siop Siarad visits.
 - Completion of 24 Culture Champion visits across watches, Control and departments, strengthening understanding of staff experience and helping to identify emerging themes and priorities.
 - Supporting the Fire Family Survey Working Group and wider use of staff feedback, culture indicators and organisational data to inform improvement activity.

- Supporting the development, review and implementation of significant organisational policies and strategies, including the Workforce Representation Strategy, promotion process improvements, transfer arrangements and safeguarding developments.
 - Securing and supporting the delivery of Welsh Government funded culture improvement initiatives, strengthening leadership development, organisational learning and workforce capability.
 - Establishment and chairing of the All-Wales Blue Light Culture Improvement Group, bringing together Fire, Police and Ambulance colleagues from across Wales to share learning, benchmark approaches and identify opportunities for collaborative improvement.
 - Strengthening governance, transparency and accountability through regular reporting to the Fire Authority, Culture Improvement Board and other governance committees.
4. The most significant achievement over the last 12 months has been the transition from a project-based response to the CREST Review towards a sustainable framework for cultural improvement. The Service now has established governance arrangements, culture performance indicators, staff engagement mechanisms, survey-based monitoring, action ownership and external benchmarking arrangements that provide a foundation for continual improvement and organisational learning.
 5. The next phase will focus on maintaining this infrastructure through existing governance, performance management and organisational assurance arrangements, with increasing emphasis on outcomes, impact and evidence of sustained cultural change.
 6. Following the conclusion of Tom Weston and Elin Hughes's secondments on 30 September 2026, Ruth Bateman has been appointed as Culture Champion on a six-month internal secondment following a recruitment process. This provides continuity and supports the next phase of delivery of the Strategic Culture Improvement Plan.

OBSERVATIONS FROM EXECUTIVE PANEL/AUDIT COMMITTEE

7. The information in this report has not been presented previously to Authority members in this consolidated format.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. It is recommended that Members:
 - i. **Note the progress made through the Culture Champion activity over the past 12 months, and the arrangements established to sustain culture improvement, including the Strategic Culture Improvement Plan, Culture KPI Dashboard, staff engagement mechanisms, Fire Family Survey monitoring arrangements and associated governance structures.**
 - ii. **Members are also asked to support the continued monitoring of organisational culture through existing governance arrangements, with future reporting focused increasingly on outcomes, organisational impact and evidence of sustainable improvement.**

INFORMATION

9. The Culture Champion secondments commenced in September 2025 following the CREST Cultural Review and were established to support the Service's cultural improvement programme.
10. Throughout the year, emphasis has been placed on understanding staff experiences and ensuring organisational improvement activity is informed by feedback. This has included station visits, engagement with staff networks, trade union representatives, working groups and formal governance arrangements.
11. A key milestone has been the establishment of monitoring and assurance arrangements to support transparency and accountability. The development of the Culture Dashboard and Culture KPIs has enabled greater transparency and visibility of progress against actions, strengthened organisational oversight and provides a framework for monitoring longer term outcomes.
12. Progress has been achieved across all six themes of the Strategic Culture Improvement Plan. This has included publication of the Workforce Representation Strategy, implementation of a new Discipline Policy, development of improvements to promotion and transfer processes, strengthening of safeguarding arrangements, relaunch of the Peer Support Network and continued development of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion initiatives.
13. The Culture Improvement Plan has evolved from a mechanism for tracking recommendations into a broader framework for monitoring culture. Through regular engagement with action owners, committee reporting arrangements, KPI development and the introduction of the Culture Dashboard, the Service has strengthened its ability to monitor

progress, identify emerging risks and demonstrate evidence of improvement.

14. Culture improvement activity has also supported wider wellbeing initiatives. During the reporting period, the Peer Support Network was relaunched, safeguarding arrangements were strengthened and workforce wellbeing initiatives continued to develop, including enhanced mental health support provision across the organisation.
15. Culture Champions have provided regular updates through the Fire Authority, Culture Improvement Board, People and Organisational Development Committee and Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee. These arrangements have strengthened transparency and accountability by providing oversight of strategic actions, workforce feedback, emerging culture indicators and organisational learning. They have also supported the development and implementation of significant organisational improvements, including the Workforce Representation Strategy, Discipline Policy, promotion process improvements, safeguarding developments and improved misconduct reporting arrangements.
16. At a national level, North Wales Fire and Rescue Service has taken a leading role in facilitating collaboration between blue light organisations through the All-Wales Blue Light Culture Improvement Group. This work has supported the sharing of learning, benchmarking of approaches and the development of professional networks focused on organisational culture and improvement.
17. A formal handover has been completed to ensure that the infrastructure, relationships, governance arrangements and monitoring systems established during the secondment are retained and embedded within business as usual.
18. The next phase will focus on maintaining momentum, monitoring impact and ensuring that culture remains an integral component of organisational assurance, performance management and continuous improvement arrangements.
19. The secondments of Tom Weston and Elin Hughes concluded on 30 September 2026. Following a recruitment process, Ruth Bateman has been appointed to the Culture Champion role on a six-month internal secondment basis. She will continue to work with the Senior Leadership Team, staff networks, Trade Unions and colleagues across the Service to support delivery of the Strategic Culture Improvement Plan and the embedding of sustainable cultural change.

IMPLICATIONS

Well-being Objectives	Culture improvement activity supports a healthy, inclusive and engaged workforce, promoting staff wellbeing, positive working relationships and long-term organisational sustainability.
Budget	Activity has primarily been delivered within existing budgets, supported by Welsh Government funding for specific culture improvement initiatives.
Legal	Supports compliance with employment, equality, and organisational governance requirements.
Staffing	Ongoing culture improvement activity aims to strengthen trust, confidence in leadership, fairness and employee experience, supporting staff wellbeing, retention and organisational effectiveness.
Equalities/ Human Rights/ Welsh Language	Culture improvement activity promotes dignity, respect, fairness and inclusion. Work undertaken through the Workforce Representation Strategy, staff engagement and policy development supports the Service's commitment to equality, human rights and Welsh Language Standards.
Risks	Maintaining momentum remains essential. Failure to sustain improvement activity or demonstrate progress in response to staff feedback may impact trust, engagement and confidence in leadership. Continued ownership, monitoring and governance oversight will be required to ensure lasting cultural change.