



Inspection of the South and Mid & West Wales Joint Fire Control and North Wales Fire Control in response to Recommendation 31 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry Phase 2

December 2025

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Executive summary

This report sets out the findings of the inspections of the South and Mid & West Wales Fire and Rescue Service Joint Fire Control and the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service Fire Control undertaken in September and October 2025.

The purpose of the inspections was to meet the commitment of Welsh Government to adopt in full Recommendation 31 from Phase 2 of the Grenfell Tower Inquiry. The inspection fieldwork sought to establish the extent to which the respective Fire Controls were integrated within their Fire and Rescue Service from a staff and an operational policy and assurance perspective. It also considered the effectiveness of the skill acquisition and maintenance training programme.

Fire Control is an essential element of providing fire and rescue services. Fire Control staff receive emergency calls, mobilise resources to incidents, liaise with other responders and provide survival guidance. Without Fire Control, it would simply not be possible to respond to emergencies effectively or at all.

The London Fire Brigade Fire Control came under scrutiny for its role in the response to the Grenfell Tower fire. In both of its reports the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry made recommendations to improve how Fire Control operates and how it interacts with the public, with firefighters at the scene of an incident and with other responders. Those recommendations were mostly addressed to the London fire Brigade but were of wider relevance too. As with the Inquiry's findings more generally, it would be naïve to think that the shortcomings it identified could only exist in London.

This report therefore acts on the recommendations in the Inquiry's second report which called for an inspection of the London Fire Brigade Fire Control. It covers the two Fire Controls in Wales. Both Fire Controls are located within Police facilities. The Joint Fire Control is located within the South Wales Police Public Service Centre at Police Headquarters in Bridgend. The North Wales Fire Control is located within the North Wales Police Joint Communications Centre in St Asaph.

Staff in the Joint Fire Control felt a high level of detachment due to several factors including the working environment and the absence of harmonised terms and conditions. The same concerns over the working environment were not reflected in the North Wales Fire Control despite it also being located within a Police facility.

The positioning of the Joint Fire Control within the dispatch section of the Public Service Centre presents challenges that may hinder the effectiveness of its operational response especially in the dynamic phases of an incident or if live fire survival guidance calls are ongoing. This is less of an issue in the Joint Communications Centre where Fire Control is positioned in the far corner of the building.

Both Fire Controls work long duration night shifts exceeding 12 hours which the Health & Safety Executive state should be avoided. The fatigue and risk implications are exacerbated by the fact that the nighttime rest period afforded to Fire Control staff in the best case is half that of their Firefighter counterparts working the shift system assuming it is not interrupted. Fire Control rest facilities are not of the same standard to those provided on fire stations and may impact on the likelihood of Firefighters (Control) achieving meaningful rest thus increasing the risk of fatigue. Extended rest periods also impact on the amount of time available for on shift training.

There are challenges for Fire Control in undertaking skill maintenance training when on shift. Unlike on a fire station Fire Control watches cannot all train together as a minimum number of Firefighters (Control) are required to staff the telephone, radio and mobilising systems. Staffing levels have a direct impact on the quality of training that can be undertaken on shift. This was reported as an issue for both Fire Controls.

It is a reality that much skill maintenance training for Firefighters (Control) will be undertaken individually in between dealing with emergency and administrative calls. That being so the quality of training materials available to Firefighters (Control) should be of a high standard. This requires addressing in both Fire Controls.

The Development to Competent process for Firefighters (Control) in development was reported as being onerous, overly bureaucratic and in some instances a barrier to retention. Despite this I heard of excellent examples of coaching and mentoring of Firefighters (Control) in development from their Crew and Watch Managers (Control).

Some policies and general instructions were reported as being out of date or no longer relevant. Crew and Watch Managers (Control) complained of a lack of clear organisational policy direction for responding to certain incident types.

The Control Management Teams recognise that there are gaps in policy and other Fire Control guidance. Staffing shortfalls and workload were cited as reasons why these issues are not being addressed as expeditiously as they should be.

There however are examples of emerging good practice around operational assurance processes. The Control Management Teams in both Fire Controls have a clear sense of direction around addressing operational policy, training and assurance issues. I am confident that with the required levels of organisation support and investment they will succeed.

The levels of engagement from all staff during the inspection visits was outstanding. Staff in both Fire Controls demonstrated a commendable commitment to duty and a real desire to contribute to improving their Fire and Rescue Services.

Fire Control is a strategic asset which is fundamental to effective operational response. In almost all circumstances it is the first and often the ongoing point of contact for the public. The Grenfell and Manchester Arena incidents highlighted the importance of Fire Control and the absolute need for it to be effective.

The recommendations in this report are made recognising the uniqueness of Fire Control and with the intention of ensuring Fire Control staff across Wales are as safe, well trained and as effective as they can be.

Introduction

On 7 July 2025 the Welsh Government published its response to the Grenfell Tower Inquiry phase two report¹. Within the response the Cabinet Secretaries for Housing and Local Government and Economy, Energy and Planning committed to the adoption in full of Recommendation 31 and set out the actions to be taken by Welsh Government to discharge the recommendation (copied below):

Recommendation 31

That His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services ("the Inspectorate") inspect the London Fire Brigade as soon as reasonably possible to assess and report on:

- *the extent to which the control room is now integrated into the organisation*
- *the effectiveness of the arrangements for identifying the training needs of control room staff, delivering effective training and recording its outcomes*
- *the effectiveness of the control room generally*
- *the ability of the control room to handle a large number of concurrent requests for advice and assistance from people directly affected by fires or other emergencies*
- *the quality and effectiveness of the arrangements for communication between the control room and the incident commander. (113.55)*

What we are committed to doing

The Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor and Inspector (Wales) (CFRAI (W)) will undertake a targeted inspection of the 3 Welsh Fire and Rescue Services to establish what arrangements are in place for assessing the training of fire control personnel and for considering how effective those arrangements are. Findings and recommendations will be set out in a report from the CFRAI(W).

This report sets out the findings and recommendations from the inspections of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) Fire Control in St Asaph and of the Joint South Wales and Mid & West Wales FRS Fire Control in Bridgend, undertaken in September and October 2025.

Prior to undertaking the inspection fieldwork, I reviewed organisational structures, work routines, and weekly and monthly duties schedules inclusive of skill maintenance programs for both Fire Controls. I also requested call volume data inclusive of administrative calls. Extracting this information presented challenges for Control Management Teams as both Welsh Fire Controls are located within Police facilities and therefore utilise the Police ICT infrastructure.

¹ [Grenfell Tower Inquiry phase 2 report: Welsh Government response \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

The inspection fieldwork included watch visits at the Joint Fire Control in Bridgend and at the secondary Fire Control in Rhyl during fire survival guidance training sessions. I also held several meetings with the Control Management Teams.

The focus of the watch visits was to determine to what extent Firefighters (Control) felt integrated within the organisation and how effective they considered the skill maintenance training regime to be.

The focus of the meetings with the Control Management Teams was to determine the extent to which Fire Control was integrated into the organisation from an operational policy and assurance perspective and what impact this had on overall effectiveness.

The ability of the Welsh Fire Controls to handle large numbers of concurrent requests for advice and assistance from people directly affected by fires or other emergencies and the quality and effectiveness of the arrangements for communication between the control room and the incident commander have been considered previously within the 2021 Thematic Review Fire and Rescue Services in Wales: Learning from Grenfell².

Since the 2021 inspection Operation Willow Beck has been developed in conjunction with Home Office, National Fire Chiefs Council and British Telecom (BT) to establish a more robust way of preventing Fire Controls becoming overwhelmed with emergency calls resulting from large or protracted incidents.

BT now has a predetermined redistribution plan to redirect overflow calls efficiently between FRSs during periods when a single Fire Control has become overwhelmed with 999 calls due to a large, protracted incident or spate conditions.

The system was used initially during the July/August 2022 wildfires with successful outcomes and on numerous occasions since. It is not therefore a primary focus of this report.

The report is split into three sections. The first section provides a generic overview of Fire Control. The second and third sections set out the inspection findings and recommendations for the North Wales FRS Fire Control and the Joint South Wales and Mid & West Wales FRS Fire Control respectively.

² [Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser thematic review: learning from Grenfell Tower Inquiry recommendations | GOV.WALES](#)

Section 1

Fire Control

Sections 7.2(c), 8.2(c) and 9.3(c) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act place a duty on the FRS to '*make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel*'. The FRS discharge this duty through the provision of a Fire Control.

The personnel who staff Fire Control are known as Firefighters (Control). The role structure within Fire Control is identical to that of a wholetime shift fire station. Typically, Fire Control will operate on a four-watch system although this can be supplemented by personnel conditioned to a day duty system to increase staffing during the daytime as this is when call volumes are highest. A watch will consist of at least two supervisory manager roles (Watch Manager A and/or B (Control) and/or Crew Manager (Control) and several Firefighters (Control) dependant on minimum staffing levels. Throughout this report the term Firefighter (Control) is used when referencing Fire Control personnel unless expressly referencing the Crew or Watch Manager (Control) role. When the term Fire Control is used this is a reference to all Fire Control personnel inclusive of watches and the Control Management Teams.

The first point of contact with the FRS for a member of the public in an emergency will often be through Fire Control. The Public Emergency Call Service (PECS) Code of Practice sets out the methods used to pass emergency calls between the call handling agent (BT in the UK) and the FRS. The initial call routed from the call handling agent to the FRS will be received by a Firefighter (Control) via an Integrated Communications Control System (ICCS) which forms part of the overall mobilising system.

The Firefighter (Control) dealing with the initial call will input the details of the emergency into the mobilising system which will identify all the possible locations for the address for triangulation with the location from which the call has originated along with the pre-determined attendance for the incident type selecting the closest appliances and tactical or specialist officers for deployment. Firefighters (Control) will then deploy the selected appliances to the incident and mobilise any Tactical³ or specialist officers as necessary. This is known as computer aided dispatch (CAD).

Throughout the duration of the incident Firefighters (Control) will record all messages from the incident on the incident log and react to and action any requests from the incident. They will also liaise with the other emergency services and partner agencies which can be numerous depending on the nature of the incident.

³ In this report the term Tactical Officer is used to describe Station or Group Managers conditioned to the flexible duty system

At the conclusion of the incident Firefighters (Control) will check the call data and either complete the Incident Recording System report (IRS – as it was known at the time of the inspection but has since transitioned to the Fire and Rescue Data Platform) or will pass on any relevant details to the Incident Commander for them to complete the IRS report.

This is a very simplistic explanation that in no way captures the complexity of many incidents. A single incident can generate multiple repeat calls, all of which need to be answered and recorded. Complex or protracted incidents can result in multiple requests for information, assistance or the attendance of specialist resources from a range of agencies.

Fire Control also acts as the central repository for multiple organisational functions which generate high volumes of administrative calls. Examples of administrative calls include safeguarding referrals, logging of appliance and equipment faults, emergency leave requests and reporting of sickness absence. The volume of administrative calls is far greater than that of emergency calls.

Specific challenges for Control Management Teams

Fire Control is unique within each FRS. There is no FRS in the UK which has more than one Fire Control and several FRS share a Fire Control including South and Mid & West Wales FRS.

This unique environment presents challenges for staffing, training and the management of fatigue.

Staffing

As stated previously Fire Control staffing typically mirrors that for a wholetime shift fire station with four watches (usually red, white, blue and green) working two days, followed by two nights followed by four rota days.

In almost all FRS across the UK there is more than one wholetime shift crewed station. If Red watch at fire station A has a staffing shortfall on a shift which would either be a Firefighter, Driver or Crew/Watch Manager and Red watch at fire station B has a surplus then depending on the shortfall a Firefighter, Driver or Crew/Watch Manager would be detached for the shift from station B to station A to cover the shortfall. This resilience is not available to Fire Control as there is only one Fire Control which must therefore be self-sufficient for staffing purposes. In practical terms this means all

abstractions (annual leave, off shift training, sickness and all other leave) must be covered from within Fire Control.

There are limited options available to Fire Control Management Teams (CMT) to manage abstractions and particularly those of a longer-term nature such as serious illnesses or maternity leave. There is a limit to which overtime can be used as it is totally reliant on the availability and willingness of Firefighters (Control) to volunteer for overtime. Watch balancing (equalising numbers across watches) can be very disruptive to the individuals affected and can negatively affect staff morale. Fixed term contracts are an option but there is a significant front-end recruitment and training requirement assuming there are enough applicants for fixed term roles in the first instance. Retirement and reengagement on part time contracts or bank hours are options but are dependent on policies in operation within individual FRSs.

Training and other developmental activity

The majority of skill maintenance training for Firefighters and Firefighters (Control) takes place on shift. There are some exceptions for example in North Wales FRS mandatory fire survival guidance training is arranged on rota days. Rota day training has been organised at the Joint Fire Control but has had varying success as attendance is voluntary and there are often last minute changes to numbers able to attend.

Firefighters on a fire station can train together as a crew as they can be mobilised via the station turn out system which has an audible alarm to alert the crew to an incident. Firefighters (Control) cannot all relocate together to the training room as a minimum number are required to staff the telephone, radio and mobilising systems. In practical terms the watch must split in half to train with one half in the training room and the other half remaining within Fire Control.

Firefighters can carry out off station training or site-specific risk information gathering visits while remaining available via radio and/or mobile data terminal on the fire appliance. Firefighters can place the appliance on a delayed turnout or make the appliance temporarily unavailable to facilitate training or other development activity. Fire Control can do none of these things.

The opportunities for off shift training are wholly contingent on the staffing model in operation within the FRS for Fire Control and the extent to which provision for off shift training is contemplated or using overtime (when attendance would most likely be voluntary). Unplanned or under anticipated abstractions can have a detrimental effect on the amount of off shift training that can be undertaken by Firefighters (Control).

Fatigue and risk

Where night shifts exceed 12 hours, as is the case within the two Welsh Fire Controls where 13.5 hour/14-hour night shifts are in operation, the fatigue and risk factors for Firefighters (Control) are elevated as the time in between the first- and second-night shift is insufficient for compensatory rest. This also falls outside of HSE guidance contained within HSG 256 to avoid shifts of over 12 hours duration.

Firefighters on the wholetime shift system are afforded a rest period from 0000 – 0700. Beds are provided on fire stations and the whole watch can take the full rest period as a collective as they can be alerted by the station turn out system which in addition to the audible alarm turns all the lights on throughout the rest facilities.

I have raised concerns around fatigue implications when Firefighters are mobilised during the rest period in previous inspection reports. This is particularly acute on the second night shift when Firefighters have had the rest period disturbed on the first night shift. I have also raised concerns around the limitations extended rest periods have on the time available for training and other risk reduction activities. These concerns apply equally to Fire Control.

Firefighters (Control) are in effect only afforded half or a third of the 0000 – 0700 rest period as their Firefighter counterparts due to the requirement to permanently cover the telephone, radio and mobilising systems. In the event of an incident or concurrent incidents that generate significant activity for Fire Control occurring during the rest period a recall is initiated which interrupts the rest period for Firefighters (Control).

In the best-case Firefighters (Control) are afforded a 3.5-hour rest period during a 13.5 hour/14-hour night shift. If the rest period is interrupted, then the risk of fatigue is increased significantly.

Section 2

South and Mid & West Wales Joint Fire Control

South Wales and Mid & West Wales FRS share a Joint Fire Control (JFC) which is located within the Public Service Centre at the South Wales Police (SWP) Headquarters in Bridgend.

There are 4 watches, Red, White, Blue and Green working the wholetime shift system as set out within the National Scheme of Conditions of Service 7th Edition April 2025 (Grey Book). Watches work two 10.5-hour day shifts (0730 – 1800) followed by two 13.5-hour night shifts (1800 – 0730) followed by four rota days.

The approved minimum staffing level within JFC is 8 per shift inclusive of 2 Crew/Watch Managers and 6 Firefighters (Control). The minimum staffing level is the same for day and night shifts. At the time of writing the interim minimum staffing level is 7 due to the number of unfilled posts within JFC.

Each watch has an established staffing level of 12 consisting of a Watch Manager A (Control), 2 Crew Managers (Control) and 9 Firefighters (Control).

There is an agreement in place to recruit 4 Station Manager A non flexi roles. It is intended that these roles, once filled, will be watch based and responsible for operational performance and assurance.

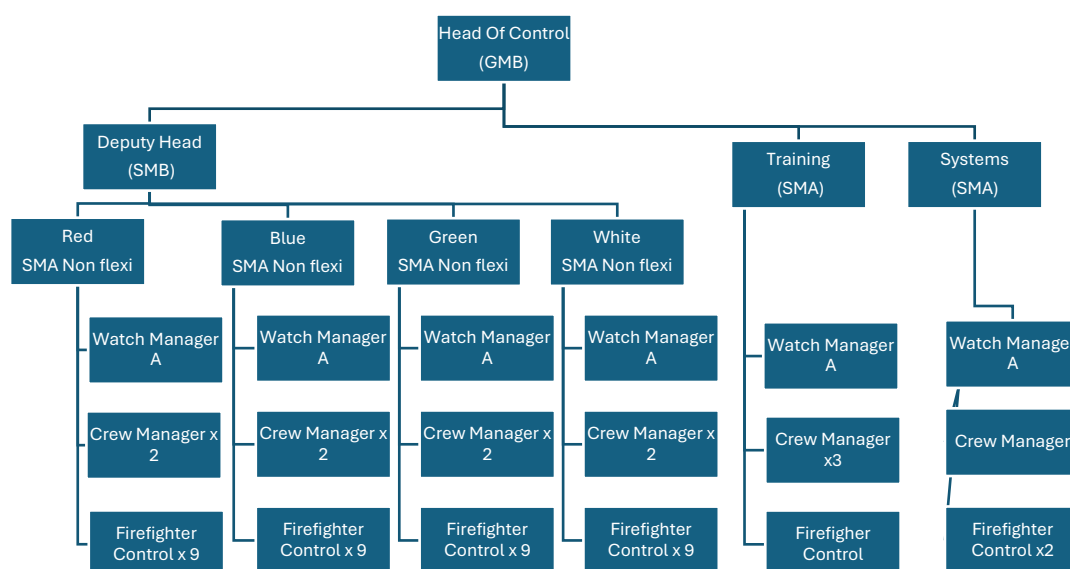
The Head of the CMT is a Group Manager B (Control). The Deputy Head of the CMT is a Station Manager B (Control) who works alongside a Station Manager A (Control) responsible for Training and a Station Manager A (Control) responsible for Systems. All four Officers are conditioned to the Grey Book flexible duty system which means they work core office hours but provide out of hours emergency response cover.

The established staffing level of the CMT is 15 consisting of the 4 flexible duty roles outlined above, a Watch Manager A (Control), 3 Crew Managers (Control), a Firefighter (Control) and a Grade 6 administrator in Training and a Watch Manager A (Control), a Crew Manager (Control), 2 Firefighters (Control) and a Grade 6 administrator in Systems.

At the time of writing the actual CMT staffing level is 10 with 2 Crew Manager (Control), a Firefighter (Control) and the administrator roles vacant in Training and the Firefighter (Control) and administrator roles vacant in Systems. The uniformed vacancies cannot be filled until the watches are up to the established strength.

Current abstractions within JFC are high. A total of 62 JFC staff has exited the organisation since 2017, only 22 of which were on retirement. Staff retention is reported as being a significant challenge for CMT. The reasons given for resignations on exit interviews include terms and conditions, lack of flexibility within the shift system, lack of investment in personal training and development and the Development to Competent process which is explained in more detail below.

Figure 1: JFC Organisation Chart



JFC received 59,300 emergency calls in 2024/25 of which 14,957 were repeat calls. A further 17,755 calls were received to non-emergency incidents such as controlled burning notifications. Between October 2024 and September 2025 JFC received 91,022 administrative calls of which 9,085 were not answered. Emergency and administrative call volumes are substantially higher during the day than overnight.

Table 1: JFC call volumes

Financial Year	MWWFRS Incidents	MWWFRS Other Emergency	MWWFRS Repeat Calls	MWWFRS Total Emergency Calls	MWWFRS – Other Admin (non-emergency)	MWWFRS Grant Total	SWFRS Incidents	SWFRS Other Emergency	SWFRS Repeat Calls	SWFRS Total Emergency Calls	SWFRS – Other Admin (non-emergency)	SWFRS Grant Total	MWWFRS & SWFRS Combined Grand Total
2012/2013	12,746	2,948	4,180	19,874	8,448	28,322	16,842	3,952	8,057	28,851	3,402	32,253	60,575
2013/2014	13,844	3,407	5,157	22,408	10,672	33,080	18,553	3,976	10,894	33,423	3,752	37,175	70,255
2014/2015	12,925	2,912	3,656	19,493	10,179	29,672	17,514	4,231	7,751	29,496	4,598	34,094	63,766
2015/2016	13,559	3,449	4,784	21,792	12,370	34,162	18,416	4,197	12,757	35,370	7,048	42,418	76,580
2016/2017	14,562	3,817	4,219	22,598	11,023	33,621	17,434	5,241	8,951	31,626	8,191	39,817	73,438
2017/2018	13,919	3,640	4,992	22,551	9,758	32,309	17,338	5,534	9,553	32,425	8,230	40,655	72,964
2018/2019	13,710	3,753	6,790	24,253	7,696	31,949	17,950	5,188	15,430	38,568	8,613	47,181	79,130
2019/2020	13,481	4,122	6,289	23,892	8,949	32,841	16,950	5,620	10,474	33,044	9,925	42,969	75,810
2020/2021	11,006	3,505	4,934	19,445	7,986	27,431	16,767	4,820	10,472	32,059	9,493	41,552	68,983
2021/2022	12,133	3,676	5,379	21,188	8,096	29,284	17,532	4,933	9,986	32,451	9,828	42,279	71,563
2022/2023	13,113	3,906	5,097	22,116	7,317	29,433	18,743	5,522	10,413	34,978	10,052	44,730	74,163
2023/2024	13,399	4,297	4,573	22,269	7,400	29,669	19,112	5,757	12,044	36,913	10,329	47,242	76,911
2024/2025	12,758	5,592	4,916	23,266	7,472	30,738	19,411	6,582	10,041	36,034	10,283	46,317	77,055
Grand Total	171,155	49,024	64,966	285,145	117,366	402,511	232,562	65,553	136,823	434,938	103,744	538,682	941,193

When JFC was first established a Protection & Prevention Team (Firefighters (Control) working normal office hours) dealt with administrative calls alongside rota management, general instruction (GI) maintenance and development and provided resilient cover increasing the on duty watch strength to 10 during peak hours of demand. Following a review undertaken taken in 2021 the Protection & Prevention Team was disbanded with team members redeployed across the four watches.

Initial acquisition and skill maintenance training

Initial training for a JFC Firefighter (Control) is delivered by the Training Team. This takes place between the training room in the JFC and the fallback control when available for FRS use. The initial course runs for either 6 or 7 weeks depending on the progress of the trainees. A further 7 weeks training is then undertaken with the trainees allocated to a watch albeit supernumerary (not forming part of the minimum staffing level). A 'fit to ride' competency assessment is undertaken at around 14 weeks again depending on progress after which the trainee is allocated to a watch. After six months consolidation on the watch the trainee commences what is known as the Development to Competent (D2C) process.

The D2C process concludes with the award of an NVQ Level 3 in Emergency Call Management and Mobilising through Skills for Justice (SFJ). South Wales FRS is an accredited centre for SFJ qualifications however the Emergency Call Management and Mobilising Emergency Call Management and Mobilising NVQ is not included in the list of qualifications that South Wales FRS can award. The process is however accredited by SFJ.

The Emergency Call Management and Mobilising syllabus is aligned to National Occupational Standards and consists of five Units each containing one or more Elements:

Unit CO1 Elements	Maintain information on EFS operational resources CO1.1 Monitor the availability of operational resources
Unit CO2 Elements	Take responsibility for effective performance CO2.1 Take responsibility for personal performance

Unit CO3	Co-ordinate response to assist with resolution of event
Elements	CO3.1 Gather information to aid effective response CO3.2 Mobilise resources in response to the needs of an event CO3.3 Support emergency callers CO3.4 Support ongoing needs of an event
Unit CO5	Manage information to support the needs of your community
Elements	CO5.1 Gather required information CO5.2 Inform and advise others

The D2C process is referenced in more detail later in this report.

Issues highlighted during meetings with watches and CMT – Integration

The issues raised relating to integration within the JFC were concerned with two distinct areas. The first was in relation to the extant employment arrangements whereby 60% of JFC staff are employed by South Wales FRS and 40% are employed by Mid & West Wales FRS. This split is to reflect the relative sizes of both organisations but gives rise to two different sets of terms and conditions. The second was in relation to the JFC being located within a Police facility. I consider both separately below.

Employment status, contracts and other internal integration issues

The difference in terms and conditions of employment for South and Mid & West Wales FRS was an overt source of tension although to the credit of all staff I did not get any sense that this caused any personal animosity. To the contrary JFC staff had a commendably strong sense of camaraderie. The evident tension instead was aimed at the respective FRSs.

The most commonly occurring point of tension was the provision of maternity leave which South Wales FRS have recently increased to 12 months, and which is now double that afforded to Mid & West Wales FRS employees. It was however recognised that Mid & West Wales FRS healthcare provision will be superior once adopted. Continual Professional Development payments also differ which results in a variation in overall pay. A concern expressed by JFC staff was that if there was to be a harmonisation of terms and conditions then this would be to the lower rather than higher standard.

It was observed that JFC staff wear the uniform of the employing FRS. Mid & West Wales FRS uniforms have the Service crest on the shirt whereas South Wales FRS uniforms do not. While this is largely symbolic its cultural significance should not be underestimated. It was stated to me that JFC staff take calls and mobilise for both FRS, yet they wear different uniforms and are employed on different terms and conditions.

JFC staff commented that South Wales FRS had recently commenced the practice of deploying the duty Group Manager into Fire Control on weekdays. This was viewed as mostly positive however it was noted that it was often impractical for the Group Manager to dial into routine Teams meetings or to deal with emails relating to their day role owing to the general noise levels in the room and difficulties with Wi-Fi connectivity. This meant that the Group Manager would relocate to offices elsewhere in the Public Service Centre which negated the value of them being in the JFC. It was recognised that travel distances made it impractical for Mid & West Wales FRS to replicate this arrangement but that this increased the sense of isolation for Mid & West Wales FRS staff. A concern was expressed that the presence of the duty Group Manager undermined the role of the Fire Control Officer in Charge and Mobilising Officer. I return to this point later in this section.

It was raised on several occasions that when the Mid & West Wales FRS intranet @Work was replaced by Insight, Fire Control was not recognised as a department alongside Community Safety, Business Fire Safety etc on Insight. It was also raised that media communications often failed to recognise the contribution of Fire Control to the resolution of significant incidents or during spate calls.

There was a feeling amongst Firefighters (Control) that they were not considered for wellbeing support following a critical incident in the same way as the Firefighters attending the incident. Critical incidents are given a wellbeing tag by Fire Control which notifies the Trauma Risk Management Team. This generates emails to the Firefighters involved setting out the support available to them. Fire Control staff stated that there are some incidents that Firefighters on scene may not declare as critical, but that Firefighters (Control) would benefit from the wellbeing tag being applied.

The comment was made that the Fenella Morris KC report published in January 2024 had led to an increase in engagement from the respective FRS but had not substantially alleviated the sense of isolation for both sets of employees.

JFC hosted within a Police facility

There were several common issues raised resulting from the JFC being hosted within a Police facility.

The most commonly occurring concern was in relation to the positioning of the JFC within what is also the South Wales Police Public Service Centre. JFC is positioned in the middle of the Police dispatch area which creates operational challenges.

It was raised on several occasions that Police colleagues shout over their FRS counterparts which is extremely disruptive especially when Firefighters (Control) are taking emergency calls. The situation was described to me as:

“...like trying to run Fire Control from Weatherspoon’s on a match day”

This has the potential to cause significant issues, especially in the dynamic phases of an incident if there are live fire survival guidance calls underway. Conversely, when emergency calls are received by JFC an audible alarm sounds which can be disruptive to Police colleagues especially during spate conditions when multiple concurrent calls are received over extended periods of time.

It is not practical for JFC to have a loudspeaker to monitor the main scheme airwave radio channels as this would be disruptive to Police colleagues. This denies JFC personnel shared situational awareness from developing incidents as only the Firefighter (Control) who is monitoring radio channels via headset can listen in to incident ground messages.

CCTV from across the South Wales Police Force area is visible to JFC staff which can be of operational benefit however I was told of instances where Firefighters (Control) had observed highly distressing events which had left them feeling traumatised.

One of the benefits of the JFC being located within the Public Service Centre is shared situational awareness. I was told of occasions when this benefit has not always been realised. During the Ely riots it was reported that it was only after a Watch Manager (Control) observed vehicles on fire on the CCTV around 2300 and enquired to Police colleagues what was happening that they were briefed as to the extent of the civil disturbances which had been ongoing by that point for several hours. However, liaison appears to be effective for more routine incidents.

JFC staff do not have direct access to either FRS intranet which serves as the gateway to all internally hosted applications. This is because JFC staff have FRS email addresses provided by Mid & West Wales FRS through Microsoft licences but are hosted on the Police ICT system. The outbound gateway to the South and Mid & West

Wales FRS systems is through the Police network which requires multiple log ins. This was reported as being a cause of much frustration as staff are effectively remotely accessing FRS systems which introduces more steps and is slower. A common example raised was what should be a simple task of sending an email was made far more complicated if the email address was for a South Wales FRS recipient as it was not possible to directly access the Outlook Global Address Book for South Wales FRS. Similar examples were raised around not being able to access Teams channels which led to JFC staff employed by Mid & West Wales FRS being excluded from South Wales FRS group chats.

The same challenges were reported when accessing the pdrPro competency recording system and LearnPro learning management system.

The facilities allocated to JFC staff were identified as a cause for concern as were access to the facilities management arrangements which are delivered through the Police. This led to a view that estates faults reported by the FRS are not a priority and remain unresolved for extended periods. I was advised by CMT that faults are generally slow to be repaired for both the FRS and Police.

An issue that was raised several times was the positioning of the JFC directly below the air conditioning vents. It was stated that in winter Firefighters (Control) resorted to wearing hoodies, coats or both and wrapping themselves in blankets with hot water bottles. Similar issues were raised over lighting which affected Firefighters (Control) viewing their display screens and keyboards. The condition of the toilets was also raised as a concern.

The JFC training room is some distance from Fire Control and is also used as a break room by the Police and an Operational Support Room in the event of a significant incident. JFC staff reported multiple occasions when training had been postponed or disrupted through not having access to the room.

Unlike on a fire station operating the wholetime shift system there are no purpose designed or dedicated rest rooms for JFC staff. The rooms that are available to JFC staff are also used by Police colleagues and are adjacent to break rooms and a kitchen. They contain a single sofa bed/reclining chair but are in no way comparable to the beds provided for firefighters on fire stations. I have referenced causes for concern around fatigue identified in previous inspections in the Introduction section of this report. It was reported to me that Firefighters (Control) would sleep in their cars rather than use the rooms provided for them. It was also reported that on occasions when JFC staff had been recalled during a rest period and they had returned to the rest room, they had found it occupied by Police staff with their personal belongings left out on the corridor.

This is a serious cause for concern from a fatigue perspective. HSE publication HSG 256 advises employers to avoid shifts longer than twelve hours. The JFC night shift is thirteen and a half hours which only allows for a ten-and-a-half-hour break between the first- and second-night shift. I am aware that there are JFC staff who have long commutes which will seriously limit their ability to rest in between the first- and second-night shift in addition to the risk of driving while fatigued.

It was stated by several JFC staff that they felt them being allowed to sleep on a night shift caused animosity with the Police. This is a practice unique to the FRS and does prove contentious with other Emergency Services.

There were positive aspects to working within the JFC referenced including charity fund raising, shared catering and social events, particularly with the Training and Systems Teams and Police colleagues. It was noted that Police colleagues help with refreshments during spate conditions and large incidents and during heatwaves when the working environment is warm.

I was told of various joint ventures across Police and Fire teams to develop a sense of one team.

The majority view expressed by JFC staff however was that the working environment left much to be desired and was detrimental to morale and operational effectiveness.

There were two quotes which encapsulate the views expressed in relation to how JFC staff feel over their integration within their respective FRS and the Police facility.

“We are remote, and not part of the Fire and Rescue Service”

“I feel like we are guests, staying in their (the Police’s) living room”

Issues highlighted during meetings with watches and CMT – Training

Initial training is delivered by the Training Team who at the time of the inspection were understaffed and had been for most of the time since the inception of the JFC.

The maximum number of trainees on any initial course is governed by three factors; the number of available training stations (these have the full mobilising system configuration other than the ability to mobilise), the maximum trainee to instructor ratio and the ability of the watches to receive new trainees and effectively integrate them into operations while supporting the D2C process.

There are 6 training stations in the JFC training room. Training courses typically run with 4 trainees. It was attempted to run the most recent training course at the time of the inspection with 6 however this proved unviable due to the practicalities of accommodating 6 new trainees across the watches for the reasons stated previously.

The number of vacancies within JFC and ongoing high attrition rate means that the initial training demand is consistently high. This has and continues to present challenges for the Training Team. These challenges are compounded by the requirement to deliver initial and refresher training to Auxiliary Fire Control staff. These are staff who are deployed in the event of industrial action by JFC staff. Whilst their training is not to the same level as JFC staff it is still resource intensive.

It was reported by the Training Team that in preparing to deliver a course they face challenges in having Trainees set up on the Police systems which they have no direct control over. Issues were also reported over the vetting process which was a common cause of delay in starting courses.

The Training Team is also responsible for skill maintenance training packages for JFC staff inclusive of Fire Survival Guidance. They stated it was a real challenge for them to develop and update training packages due to workload. Practically this can result in outdated training materials available to Fire Control on the most basic platforms, typically action plans or GIs in list format on a Word document. The Training Team acknowledged that there is an absence of quality training material available for on shift training for this reason.

There is no doubting the commitment or professionalism of the Training Team, but they reported real difficulty in meeting their objectives due to their workload and were able to point to substantial evidence in support of this view.

JFC staff raised issues about the currency and quality of training materials and it being spread across multiple platforms. There is also a need to complete mandatory training twice to satisfy both FRS e.g. domestic violence, safeguarding and cultural training. Skill maintenance most often consists of Firefighters (Control) independently reading the Word documents referenced previously in between dealing with emergency and administrative calls. This is far from ideal in any circumstances as the content is subject to the interpretation of the individual Firefighter (Control) when not delivered as part of an instructor led session. The situation is further compounded when the content is outdated.

The best-case training scenario would be for the Training Team or a Crew or Watch Manager (Control) to relocate to the training room with as many Firefighters (Control) as can be abstracted from response duties to deliver what should be consistent and standardised training against a lesson plan with specific learning outcomes developed

by the Training Team. This would however have to be repeated until such time all the watch had received the training simply because as explained previously, when on shift, the whole watch cannot relocate to the training room.

The D2C process was reported as being onerous and overly bureaucratic for trainees and Crew and Watch Managers (Control) alike. I was told of several instances when the D2C process was the reason a trainee exited the organisation.

Crew and Watch Managers (Control) described some excellent examples of how they coached and mentored trainees when dealing with emergency calls, but they expressed understandable frustration as to the difficulties in cross referencing this with elements of the NOS which they described as nothing more than a tick box exercise. These challenges also extend to Crew and Watch Managers (Control) who must also successfully complete a D2C process on promotion.

It was reported to me that there have been shifts when all the on-duty watch are in development. As unavoidable as this might be, it is far from ideal.

The impact of reduced staffing levels on conducting D2C and skill maintenance training was raised at each watch meeting.

The practicalities of on watch training are a challenge for Fire Control for the reasons set out in the introduction to this report. This challenge is compounded when staffing is below minimum for reasons which will be self-evident. Staffing in Fire Control has a direct relationship with the ability to undertake on shift training.

Retention is clearly a challenge. I was told of a Firefighter (Control) that exited JFC as they were unable to reduce their hours. It stands to reason from an organisational perspective that it is preferable to retain an employee that has been invested in heavily for a reduced number of hours rather than to lose them completely.

CMT confirmed that JFC staff can vary their hours, and different shift patterns have been trialled in the past, however this ceased after a review in 2021. JFC staff are now limited to part time day and night shift work (one day, one night) only as night shifts cannot be covered for day only working.

Operational and administrative demand in JFC is greatest between 0800 – 1900. There are FRS throughout the UK that have variable staffing in Fire Control aligned to demand. If JFC staff wish to work reduced hours, then rostering those hours during the day would be organisationally as well as operationally beneficial and may well suit the individual.

Issues highlighted during meetings with watches and CMT – Policy and assurance

An area of frustration for all JFC staff was the absence of standardisation in policy both across the two FRS and with external agencies, most commonly in dealing with requests for assistance from Welsh Ambulance Service Trust (WAST).

The differences in responses to Unwanted Fire Signals between Mid & West and South Wales FRS was raised frequently. An example given was the difficulties for a new trainee in understanding the different and often conflicting mobilising approaches taken by both FRS in addition to everything else they were expected to learn.

Also referenced were the different approaches between the FRS to Assist Ambulance calls. For a bariatric incident occurring in South Wales, Firefighters (Control) must confirm if the WAST Hazardous Area Response Team (HART) are attending, and if they are not attending why not, if they are committed to another incident, what is the incident number and whether the patient is time critical or not. Watch Managers (Control) made the point that even with this information they are still unable to mobilise and must pass the information to the Duty Group Manager for a decision which will often differ from one Group Manager to another. This results in an inconsistent approach as different Group Managers have varying views on attendance.

Another continually reoccurring theme across the watches was when requested to effect entry for WAST to access a casualty, determining who was responsible for securing the premises thereafter. This issue appears to have been compounded by changes to Police policy. The Police would previously have had access to arrangements for premises security but have stepped back from this incident type under the 'Right Care – Right Person' approach.

The fact that these issues were reported as continually recurring reflects the absence of a formalised standalone operational assurance process within Fire Control that provides a mechanism to escalate issues to the appropriate level in the respective FRS where a definitive policy decision can be taken.

An example given was the emerging trend for young people to film videos of themselves in a child's swing to upload to their social media feeds. This had resulted in an increase of calls to the FRS if they subsequently could not extricate themselves or if the intention was to create that impression for the opportunity to then film the FRS extricating them. Firefighters (Control) using their own initiative developed through years of experience dealing with hoax calls challenged callers to extricate themselves or have their friends assist them to prevent the unnecessary mobilisation of a fire

appliance. It was stated that this was escalated within both FRS, but no definitive policy decision was taken as to the approach to adopt.

A view expressed was that “*lip service*” is being paid to operational assurance, debriefs and emergency call audits and that they are nothing more than a tick box exercise.

“Yes, we do them; are they meaningful? No.

Debriefs are almost impossible to achieve.

Call Audits are meaningless - there is no feedback or learning and the tendency is (if we have time to do any) to cherry-pick easy calls; we are, in effect marking our own homework. Debriefs are not Control specific and tend to be a form filling exercise on the back of an Ops debrief that we seldom attend and learn nothing from. Consequently, we repeat the same mistakes time and again at all levels FF to WM”

Call audits were historically undertaken by the Protection & Prevention Team. CMT carry out independent call audits, when possible, but this is acknowledged as being intermittent due to workload. When call audits are undertaken feedback is provided to the Firefighter (Control) and Watch Manager (Control) if there are learning points. CMT have also considered Watch Managers (Control) auditing calls from other watches but there was no appetite to do this when it was proposed.

Debriefs have not been held for at least two years due to staffing levels and low Crew and Watch Manager (Control) numbers.

Having to refer to the duty Group Manager for a mobilising decision is viewed as undermining the role of the Officer in Charge or Mobilising Officer who should be empowered to make mobilising decisions.

Mid & West Wales FRS have recently advertised for expressions of interest from Tactical Officers to act as Fire Force Incident Managers within JFC. The South Wales FRS Duty Group Manager now works from JFC on weekdays. The view expressed by several Watch Managers (Control) was that they (Fire Control) need investment in training rather than diluting their role through transferring responsibility for mobilising decisions to Tactical Officers. It was highlighted that failures of decision making in Fire Control were factors in the Manchester Arena incident. It was felt that, because of what was perceived as a ‘dumbing down’ of the role, alongside an emerging lack of experience at the supervisory and middle management level, the quality of operational decision making in Fire Control was declining resulting in a detrimental impact on operational effectiveness overall.

It was stated on several occasions that GIs and other sources of operational intelligence were out of date or not accessible in Control. It was explained to me that during the move to Bridgend, GIs from the legacy Fire Controls was lost and had to be manually rebuilt from archives. It was stated that the Protection & Prevention Team were tasked with maintaining and developing GIs but spent much of their time covering staff shortages on the watches. There is now no dedicated Team to maintain GIs. As a result, GIs are reported to contain errors, contradictions, inconsistencies and references to policies, documents, appliances and equipment that no longer exist.

A concern expressed to me was that Site Specific Information (SSI) and other flags linked to property or locations are out of date and invalid as the Systems Team are understaffed and cannot keep pace with the workload generated from continual updates while at the same time dealing with challenges arising from being hosted on the Police ICT system.

CMT face challenges in accessing even the most basic call volume data. It is far from ideal that the CMT are reliant on a third party to access call data and makes performance management far more difficult for them than it should be.

Summary of issues raised and findings

The focus of the inspection was to establish the extent to which JFC staff felt integrated within their respective FRS, and to consider to what extent the training and operational assurance regime contributed to the operational effectiveness of Fire Control.

The strong perception of JFC staff is that they do not feel integrated within their respective FRS. There are several reasons for this disconnect that I could establish definitively based on what was said to me during watch visits.

In JFC there are two distinct groups of employees, employed by two separate FRS, wearing different uniforms, employed on different terms and conditions, but performing mostly, but not exactly, the same functions depending on which FRS area the call originates from. Unsurprisingly, this is a cause of tension although to restate, to the credit of all JFC staff, I observed no evidence at all to suggest that this manifested itself through animosity between staff. To the contrary the strong sense of camaraderie was admirable.

These issues may have been alleviated when the JFC was conceived if a standalone employer entity had been created that was neither South Wales or Mid & West Wales FRS and which harmonised terms and conditions for its employees. Such an

arrangement exists within the North West Fire Control⁴. Alternatively, one or other FRS could have taken on the role of Lead Authority to employ all JFC staff to deliver the Fire Control function on behalf of both FRS.

Both options alongside consideration of whether to revert to each FRS having its own Fire Control hosted within Service would address the concerns expressed by JFC staff.

The location of the JFC within the SWP Public Service Centre is clearly a cause of tension, and possibly more so than the lack of harmonisation of terms and conditions.

I observed the location specific challenges faced by JFC staff, which are well documented in this report, first hand during the watch visits at the JFC. It may be that these can be addressed within whatever accommodation options are available to the FRS in the Public Service Centre or SWP HQ site but if not both FRS need to seriously consider the suitability of the Public Service Centre to host the JFC. I say this not least because there is evidence to suggest it is having a detrimental impact on staff retention which has multiple negative knock-on effects throughout the JFC.

However, removing JFC from the Public Service Centre may not in of itself be a panacea, especially if it was into a location that was not designed with the specific needs of Fire Control in mind. That said, I believe it would go some way to addressing the concerns raised.

If the FRS do consider relocating the JFC, then there is a need to consult in detail with Fire Control staff to ensure that any new location meets their needs accounting for the unique circumstances of the role.

Fatigue arising from the long night shift is a cause for concern. The facilities within the JFC are clearly inadequate and do not allow for meaningful rest.

As stated previously night shift rest periods are a practice unique to the FRS and are only necessary, even though they cannot be guaranteed, because of the length of the night shift. There is no suitable and sufficient risk assessment in place to address the risk of excessive fatigue as there is no practical control measure that can be reasonably employed to mitigate against it. The only practical, albeit reactive, control measure would be to grant compensatory rest on the second night shift to any JFC staff who had their rest period disturbed on the first night shift. Given the staffing challenges faced by JFC, allowing staff to start their second night shift later than the scheduled shift change time would reduce staffing levels further at the operationally busiest time of the day and is therefore impractical.

⁴ [Home - NW Fire Control](#)

Equalising the length of the day and night shift maximises the break in between night shifts and removes the need for a rest period. It can be achieved within the parameters of the shift system as set out within the Grey Book. It would also free up more time for on shift training on night shifts during periods of least operational demand and make exchanges of duty between day and night shifts more practical.

Staffing levels is clearly a substantive issue which has wide ranging ramifications not least on the ability of JFC staff to undertake meaningful skill maintenance training and for the Training and Systems Teams to meet their objectives. All these issues cause substantial challenges to the CMT in maintaining the operational effectiveness of the JFC and perpetuate a cycle of negativity.

I recognise the challenges faced by the CMT in recruiting, training and retaining staff. JFC staff are a finite resource who are far less in number than their Firefighter counterparts. CMT staff, up to and including the Head of Fire Control, routinely cover staffing shortfalls. This is commendable and is rightly respected by JFC staff. It does however detract from their core roles and their ability to address the issues identified throughout this report.

That being so, there needs to be significant organisational effort invested to fill all vacant roles within JFC in fast time, exploring all possible options.

Consideration should be given to varying staffing levels on day and night shifts to increase numbers on days. The reasons are twofold, Firstly, to match peak demand and secondly to facilitate a structured skill development and maintenance program which accounts for the unique challenges faced by Fire Control in delivering training and other developmental activities on shift.

It may be that additional staff are required for this purpose and if so, I would consider that to be a legitimate investment. Any additional staff numbers would need to be determined through an in-depth activity audit which was beyond the scope of this inspection but which I saw enough evidence of to suggest is warranted.

Staffing the Training and Systems Teams to established levels would also create the capacity to address the existing deficiencies identified in training materials and GIs identified in this report and allow for the delivery of what would need to be back-to-back initial training courses until all vacancies are filled.

Appointing into the watch-based Station Manager A (Control) roles would assist CMT in improving the deficiencies in operational assurance processes highlighted in this report. It is recognised however that with existing vacancies at Crew and Watch

Manager (Control) it will take time to progress suitably qualified and competent JFC staff into a position whereby they can apply for and be appointed into these positions.

In the interim the FRS should consider training the South Wales FRS duty Group Manager cohort who are routinely deployed into Fire Control during weekdays to undertake the operational assurance elements of the role (acknowledging that this will create an additional burden for the Training Team).

In summary, I have no reason to doubt that the JFC delivers its core functions effectively. I also have no reason to doubt the professionalism and competence of the staff. To the contrary, the attitude and commitment of all JFC staff I met with was exemplary. I do have concerns that the current positioning of Fire Control within the dispatch area of the Public Service Centre could hinder its effectiveness, especially in the dynamic phases of an incident when Firefighters (Control) could be distracted by activity taking place around them.

I am of the view that the full potential of JFC to contribute to improved operational performance is not being realised. JFC is effective despite the environment in which they operate. Addressing the issues highlighted in this report would go a long way to allowing JFC to realise their full potential.

Recommendations

The absence of harmonisation of terms and conditions within JFC is an evident cause of tension and should be addressed as a priority by both FRS.

Recommendation 1: South Wales and Mid & West Wales FRS work together to agree a mechanism by which the terms and conditions of JFC staff are harmonised.

Substantial and evidently longstanding concerns were raised by JFC staff over being located within the Public Service Centre. These concerns should be addressed as a priority by both FRS.

Recommendation 2: South Wales and Mid & West Wales FRS work together with SWP to identify if there are accommodation options available within the SWP Public Service Centre or HQ site to address the concerns identified in this report. If there are no viable accommodation options, then both FRS should identify an alternative location(s) for Fire Control and engage with JFC staff to ensure that any new location(s) meets their individual and operational needs.

Night shift durations in JFC exceed that set out within HSE guidance and do not allow for sufficient rest in between night shifts. The ability for JFC staff to have meaningful rest is limited by the existing accommodation provision and the likelihood of being recalled during the rest period. There is no suitable and sufficient risk assessment in place to address the risk of excessive fatigue as there is no practical control measure that can be reasonably employed to mitigate against it. Extended rest periods impact on the amount of time available for on shift training.

Recommendation 3: South Wales and Mid & West Wales FRS should ensure shift durations do not exceed 12 hours.

JFC is understaffed which has wide ranging implications set out in detail within this report and which undoubtedly have a detrimental impact on operational effectiveness. This should be addressed as a priority by both FRS.

Recommendation 4: South and Mid & West Wales FRS should take all necessary steps to recruit up to establishment in JFC.

Call volumes are higher during the day than overnight. The Training Team are conditioned to a day duty system and therefore are available to deliver structured training to supplement individual skill maintenance training on day shifts. Variable staffing with more Firefighters (Control) on duty during the day is in operation in Fire Controls across the UK. Increasing staffing on day shifts may be able to be achieved by reducing minimum staffing on night shifts however it may require additional roles beyond the current establishment. This would need to be established through in depth analysis of demand and training and development needs. In either event it could be achieved through the adoption of more flexible staffing options including reduced hours and days only contracts.

Recommendation 5: South and Mid & West Wales FRS should undertake an in-depth analysis of operational demand and JFC staff training and development needs with a view to increasing staffing levels on day shifts to deliver greater operational capacity to meet demand and to create greater opportunity for quality training and development activity.

Section 3

North Wales Fire Control

Since 2008 the North Wales FRS Fire Control has been located within the North Wales Joint Communications Centre (JCC) which is a shared facility with North Wales Police (NWP) adjacent to the FRS Headquarters in St Asaph.

There are 4 watches, Red, White, Blue and Green working the wholetime shift system as set out within the National Scheme of Conditions of Service 7th Edition April 2025 (Grey Book). Watches work two 10-hour day shifts (0800 – 1800) followed by two 14-hour night shifts (1800 – 0800) followed by four rota days.

The approved minimum staffing level within Fire Control is 4 per shift inclusive of a Watch Manager and 3 Firefighters (Control). The minimum staffing level is the same for day and night shifts.

Each watch has an established staffing level of 5.5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) roles consisting of a Watch Manager B (Control), a Watch Manager A (Control) and 3.5 Firefighters (Control) (FTE). The 0.5 Firefighter (Control) FTE per watch is achieved through 4 Firefighters (Control) working a 21-hour contract of one day shift and one night shift.

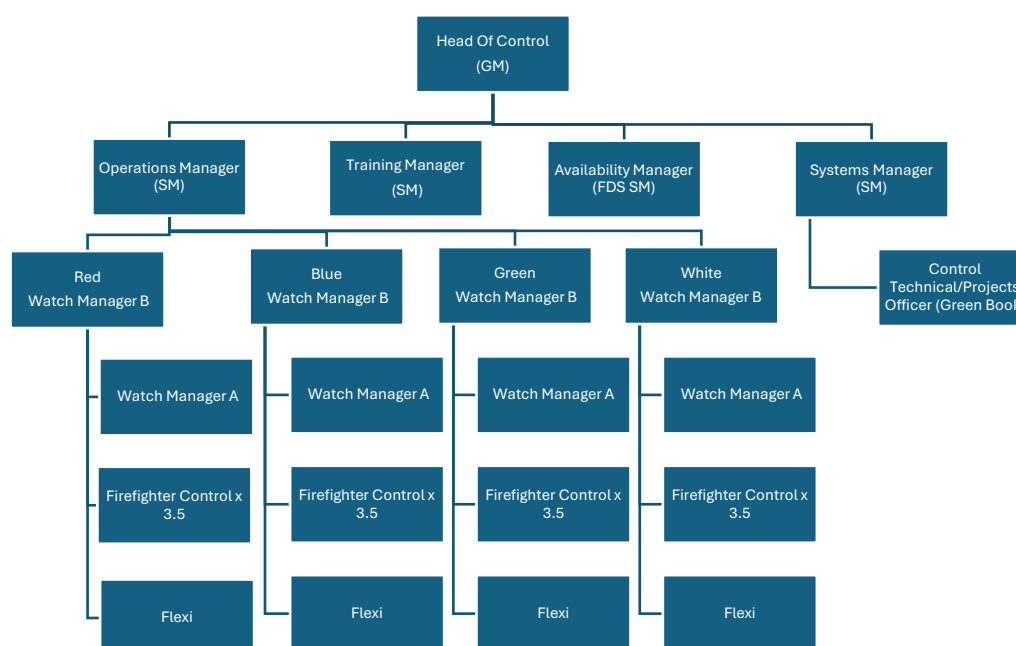
In addition to the four watches there is a flexi team consisting of 2 FTE posts which consisting of a mix of fulltime and part time staff, bringing the total establishment of Control to 24 (fulltime posts). The flexi workers are conditioned to a 12-hour shift pattern which is a combination of early (0800 – 2000) and late (1100 - 2300) shifts to cover the times of highest operational demand as well as covering during meal breaks and training sessions. The flexi team is utilised to backfill watch shortages due to sickness, maternity, detachment etc. to ensure the five and a half FTE across the watches is maintained.

This is supplemented through a temporary arrangement whereby 4 fulltime Firefighters (Control) have been recruited to cover long term sickness, maternity leave, detachment and temporary promotion. Any staff not used for this purpose are used to extend the flexi team to support the delivery of off watch training. This is to cover for absences beyond that contained within the core staffing model and in anticipation of retirements.

The Head of the CMT is a Group Manager B (Control). There are 4 Station Manager B (Control) for Operations, Training, Systems and Availability respectively (the Availability post is temporarily being covered by an operational Station Manager). All

5 Officers are conditioned to the Grey Book flexible duty system which means they work core office hours but provide out of hours emergency response cover. Working alongside the Grey Book Officers is a Fire Control Technical/Projects Officer (Green Book).

Figure 2: North Wales FRS Fire Control Organisation Chart



North Wales FRS Fire Control received 6,479 emergency calls and 3,091 repeat calls in 2024/25. During the same period North Wales FRS Fire Control received 49,439 administrative calls. Emergency and administrative call volumes are substantially higher during the day than overnight.

Table 2: North Wales FRS Fire Control call volumes

Financial year	Incidents attended	Repeat calls
2012/13	6,792	3,125
2013/14	6,364	3,445
2014/15	6,098	2,981
2015/16	4,879	2,587
2016/17	5,344	2,415
2017/18	5,726	2,486
2018/19	5,305	3,991
2019/20	4,866	2,629
2020/21	4,697	2,043
2021/22	5,356	2,660
2022/23	5,884	3,067
2023/24	5,940	2,492
2024/25	6,479	3,091

Initial acquisition and skill maintenance training

Initial training for a North Wales FRS Firefighter (Control) is delivered by the Training Manager supported by other members of CMT and through detachment from watches by Watch Managers (Control) and Firefighters (Control) as a development opportunity. The classroom element of the training mostly takes place at the fallback Fire Control in Rhyl. The initial course runs for 8 weeks. A further 8 weeks training is then undertaken with the trainees allocated to a watch albeit supernumerary (not forming part of the minimum staffing level).

A competency assessment to be counted on the minimum crewing level is undertaken at 16 weeks by the Watch Manager (Control) after which the trainee is substantively allocated to the watch. Phase 1 of the D2C process is undertaken during the 12-month probationary period and involves the completion of one workbook consisting of 4 Units. Over the following 12 to 18 months the trainee is expected to complete the D2C process culminating in the award of the SFJ Emergency Call Management and Mobilising Diploma. The Emergency Call Management and Mobilising Diploma syllabus is aligned to the National Occupational Standard previously listed in the JFC section of this report.

Issues highlighted during meetings with watches and CMT – Integration

The issues raised relating to integration within North Wales FRS Fire Control were concerned with two distinct areas. The first was in relation to being located within the JCC alongside NWP. The second was in relation to staff perceptions as to how well integrated Fire Control was within North Wales FRS.

Fire Control hosted within a Police facility

Fire Control staff were mostly positive about their workplace location within the JCC.

Fire Control is positioned in the corner of the dispatch area adjacent to the Force Incident Managers bank of desks. This allows for a degree of separation and avoids the levels of disruption reported in the JFC. The Fire Control pods are not currently configured in a semi-circle which can aid situational awareness as Firefighters (Control) can maintain visual contact, but this was not identified as being problematic. Following issues raised at incident debriefs and staff feedback changes have been made to the second pod to increase situational awareness during the dynamic phases of incidents.

Fire Control is on the ground floor whereas the training room, rest facilities and CMT offices are on the first floor. This was also not identified as being overly problematic although the location of the training room was recognised as not being ideal due to its distance from Fire Control.

The rest rooms are located away from areas where there would typically be a higher footfall and activity overnight and as a result Firefighters (Control) being disturbed by Police staff when on rest breaks was not reported in the same way as for the JFC. That said the rest provisions within the JCC are not to the same standard available to firefighters on fire stations. The concerns raised in the JFC section of this report over fatigue and risk are the same for the North Wales FRS Fire Control.

Fire Control staff reported good working relationships with Police colleagues. Fire and Police shifts at the JCC are aligned so typically the same supervisory managers will work together and therefore develop close professional relationships. One example as to how Police staff 'looked out' for FRS colleagues was with what was described as the Sunday morning breakfast run when the Police would take, collect and deliver orders for Fire Control as staffing invariably meant they could not leave the JCC. This camaraderie strengthens joint working in the operational environment.

Operationally I was advised of an incident in Llandudno which resulted in multiple calls being received. One of the callers stated that a petrol bomb had been used against the property. The duty Watch Manager (Control) immediately passed this information onto the Force Incident Manager verbally who mobilised Police resources that were able to arrest the offenders at scene. Had the Watch Manager (Control) and Force Incident Manager not been colocated physically it is unlikely this information could have been passed sufficiently quickly to enable the arrest.

Integration within North Wales FRS

The efforts of the CMT and Chief Fire Officer to integrate Fire Control into the Service were recognised by Fire Control staff. There was a strong sense that there had been a tangible improvement in recent years even if it was viewed that there was still work to do.

A view expressed on all the watch visits was that the most significant barrier to greater integration was staffing levels which hindered the ability to undertake detached duties.

Fire Control staff described the value they derived from visiting fire stations to receive input on response capabilities or attending incidents or exercises. An often-repeated complaint was how infrequent this opportunity was afforded to Fire Control staff due to being at minimum staffing.

In considering this, CMT endeavour to bring FRS resources into the JCC to deliver presentations or input on specialist capabilities to Fire Control and to Police colleagues. When staffing allows CMT have actively sought to give the opportunity to Fire Control staff to visit stations. Examples given were opportunities for Firefighters (Control) to attend a Retained Duty System station drill night on the way into a night shift or to accompany CMT members to drill nights where the CMT Officer was the Station Support Officer for the station. CMT reported limited uptake for these opportunities.

The lack of opportunity to attend and be able to contribute to debriefs was also mentioned on multiple occasions. CMT confirmed that if staffing permits, they always offer the opportunity for a member of the watch to attend debriefs.

An issue raised on several occasions was the absence of a dedicated vehicle for Fire Control which meant that if there was sufficient staffing on a shift to allow for a detachment the Firefighter (Control) would have to use their own vehicle to drive to the fire station, incident or exercise location depending on the purpose of the detachment or have to request a Tactical Officer or member of CMT to take them.

It was confirmed to me by CMT that Fire Control no longer has a dedicated vehicle but there is a vehicle at Headquarters which is adjacent to the JCC that should be available on night shifts or at weekends. During a day shift the alternative to a Firefighter (Control) using their own vehicle would be to be transported to and from the detachment by a member of the CMT or a Tactical Officer, several of whom would typically be in Headquarters. I can see the logic for this however I can also see why this is viewed as an issue for Fire Control staff. They may be merit in allocating Fire Control a dedicated vehicle even only for the purposes of no notice evacuations to the secondary Control accepting it may have relatively low usage.

Fire Control do not have a responsibility to staff the Incident Command Unit (ICU). It was recognised that staffing levels mostly precluded this from happening, but it was felt strongly that Firefighters (Control) could add significant operational value if they were able to perform this role. This was acknowledged by CMT who could absolutely see the value and would support this if staffing allowed.

A comment was made that the ICU is dated and requires refresh. It was highlighted that if the ICU was equipped with Starlink internet as with the Hazardous Materials Response Unit it would provide an additional resilient communications channel to Fire Control for video conferencing and Teams meetings, along with the immediate transferring of risk critical information. Furthermore, if the ICU was equipped with smart boards that could capture information such as live fire survival guidance calls, then this would aid the Evacuation Sector Commander who would otherwise be receiving

or relaying information regarding the persons trapped or remaining in situ verbally over the radio. CMT are represented on an Evacuation Sector working group where these issues are being actively considered.

Fire Control staff expressed a very strong connection with the Response function. I heard the phrase *“we are part of Response”* on several occasions. The desire to contribute to improving the Service is commendable but there was a sense of frustration expressed that the views of Fire Control were not always sought or fully considered.

Examples quoted were as follows:

“No Fire Control input has been sought to date in the design of the new Training Centre”.

This was considered to be a *“missed opportunity”*

“Suggestions made by Fire Control aren’t acted upon or considered”

An example given was an increasing number of make ups for additional lengths of hose. With stowage space on appliances at a premium the number of hose lengths have been reduced. As a result, Incident Commanders are making up for additional hose. Appliance availability is an ongoing challenge therefore additional make ups places a strain on resources which is felt most acutely in Fire Control as it is they who must maintain emergency response coverage through strategic cover moves. Another example was the increasing number of occasions replacement fire kit is required due to contamination at structure fires which results in appliance unavailability and Fire Control having to task Tactical Officers to emergency kit stores.

A suggestion from Fire Control was:

“...for the Service to introduce general purpose vehicles (GPVs), containing lengths of hose, perhaps some random sizes of fire kit etc thereby relieving pressure on the service at any large/protracted incidents. It could also keep an otherwise quiet retained station keen and involved as they could crew the GPV”.

This suggestion has much merit and would undoubtedly be effective in maintaining appliance availability through mobilising the most appropriate resource to deliver specific capability to the incident ground. A GPV could be crewed by a Retained Duty System (RDS) crew or alternatively it could be crewed by Firefighters on ‘other duties’ who wished to remain on the shift system.

The Training Manager is on the Training Centre working group however it was acknowledged by CMT that there have been little in the way of updates to the quarterly Watch Manager meetings. In response CMT committed to provide updates at future meetings.

Following a recent incident on another FRS area (post inspection fieldwork) Fire Control staff submitted several observations and recommendations to CMT. In response CMT convened a meeting with relevant officers within the Service and changes to GIs were agreed and implemented. This is good practice and highlights the valuable contribution Fire Control can make to operational response.

Reduced RDS appliance availability and the impact on emergency cover have been rightly identified by the Service as a significant challenge. Fire Control, with their global overview of availability, must manage the impacts of reduced availability dynamically on a shift-by-shift basis. Fire Control are well placed therefore to make informed proposals, and can no doubt contribute positively to improving response performance when they are fully engaged in the operational assurance process. I return to this point under the Summary section below.

Issues highlighted during meetings with watches and CMT – Training

The maximum number of trainees on initial courses is governed the number of available training stations in the fallback control in Rhyl (4) and the ability of the watches to support the initial training needs of the trainee.

North Wales FRS have made a concerted effort to increase staffing in Fire Control through proactive vacancy management and through the recruitment of 4 temporary Firefighters (Control), so initial training demand has been high.

In addition to initial and skill maintenance training the Training Manager also delivers Fire Survival Guidance training which is undertaken off shift.

The majority of skill maintenance training is undertaken on shift. The Watch Manager A on each watch has the training reference so in the best case they and one or more Firefighter (Control) will relocate to the Training Room along with the Training Manager to undertake on shift skill maintenance training. However, it was reported that undertaking training in this way is often not possible due to staffing or is interrupted through operational demand. As a result, the majority of skill maintenance training is undertaken by Firefighters (Control) individually in between operational duties and mostly consists of reading GIs. This is far from ideal for the reasons stated in the JFC section of this report.

It was acknowledged by the Training Manager that there were limited Fire Control specific training packages available on the Learning Management System (LearnPro). This is also true to an extent of Firefighter skill maintenance packages and is something that is in the process of being addressed by the Service.

As with the JFC, the D2C process was reported as being onerous and overly bureaucratic for trainees and Watch Managers (Control) alike.

Another issue raised was the absence of the Crew Manager (Control) role. The view was expressed that it was “*a big jump (from Firefighter (Control) to Watch Manager A (Control)), considering it could happen in as little as 3 years*”. The Crew Manager (Control) role was viewed as providing the opportunity for a Firefighter (Control) to more gradually transition into a supervisory management position in a sequential and ordered way.

The Crew Manager (Control) role was also described as “*a great leadership position that could provide additional resilience to watches*”.

These are valid points to raise. The Service position is that they have defaulted to the higher role with a Watch Manager A (Control) and a Watch Manager B (Control) unlike in the JFC where there are a Watch Manager A (Control) and 2 Crew Managers (Control) on each watch. This is an equally valid position to adopt.

If the Service were to re-introduce the Crew Manager (Control) role in addition to the existing Watch Manager A and B (Control) roles there would be an added, albeit marginal, cost. With a minimum staffing level of 4 there would also be occasions when the duty watch consisted of a Watch Manager B (Control), Watch Manager A (Control), Crew Manager (Control) and only one Firefighter (Control) which would be very rank heavy. As it stands if only one Watch Manager (Control) is on duty a Firefighter (Control) acts up to Crew Manager (Control) for the full shift thus incurring a cost so there may be merit in the Service at least considering the re-introduction of the Crew Manager (Control) role from a training and development perspective. This has however been tried previously but with limited success. CMT have sought expressions of interest from Firefighters (Control) to partake in a Watch Manager development pathway with dedicated and structured training days. This also has merit and may well address the concerns expressed during the watch visits.

Issues highlighted during meetings with watches and CMT – Policy and assurance

Fire Control staff across the watches expressed frustrations over dealing with requests for assistance from WAST often for the purposes of gaining entry. In the discussions

that followed it was recognised and acknowledged that WAST engage with 3 FRS across Wales each with different policy approaches to certain incident types. The concern raised however was the perceived absence of standardised policy guidance for Fire Control and the feeling that Watch Managers (Control) were left to make their own decisions.

This was not limited to calls from WAST. It was stated that Watch Managers (Control) frequently dynamically manage calls, and on any occasion operational discretion is used it is recorded as a decision update on the incident log. The view was however that this is not routinely acted on or results in any change to policy meaning that the same situation can arise again but may be dealt with differently by another Watch Manager (Control).

There has been a concerted effort to integrate Fire Control within the Service operational assurance processes which I have previously observed in my most recent previous inspection of North Wales FRS in January 2025.

The Station Manager (Control) Training attends the monthly Operational Assurance meeting chaired by the Group Manager Response which is an opportunity to raise Fire Control specific issues and to track Fire Control specific actions raised through debriefs and post incident reviews at the organisational level.

This is a positive step and while I would consider the process to be at the 'developing' rather than 'embedded' stage the intent represents good practice.

In discussions with CMT it was acknowledged that there were new working practices that had been developed through testing which are not yet formalised in policy. These now need to be formalised in policy and embedded through training.

CMT confirmed that at 1000 on weekdays a review of the previous 24 hours is undertaken. This is good practice and allows for the identification of issues of significance in fast time. What is also required is the mechanism to act on identified issues in fast time. CMT should not need to wait for the monthly Operational Assurance meeting to escalate issues relating to a change of policy or to establish a definite policy position as appears to be required for example with responses to assist WAST. CMT can change GIs and action plans dynamically. In practice this will be done in conjunction with the Group Manager Response usually through the auspices of the Organisational Learning Group. The Operational Assurance policy should be amended to explicitly reference this process to ensure this good practice is formalised, embedded and future proofed.

There are occasions when for organisational reasons issues raised by Fire Control have not been progressed or only partially addressed. There would be merit in building

in a feedback element to the process in order that progress updates or otherwise along with the rationale can be disseminated back to Fire Control.

A frustration expressed during watch meetings was the requirement to inform multiple Tactical Officers of the same message or pass the same incident information. Fire Control staff confirmed to me that they recorded all significant information relating to the incident on the incident log. I have seen first-hand the quality and depth of the information recorded by Fire Control when I reviewed incident logs for the January 2025 inspection considering the effectiveness of response to domestic dwelling fires.

The view of Fire Control was that after the first notification Tactical Officers should monitor the incident talk group and review the incident log on Cadview (the North Wales FRS mobilising system remote access portal) to avoid duplication of work and unnecessarily burdening Fire Control staff relaying this information.

If this was adopted as policy, it would reduce demand on Fire Control particularly in what is often a dynamic and resource intensive phase of an incident.

Summary of issues raised and findings

The focus of the inspection was to establish the extent to which Fire Control staff felt integrated within North Wales FRS, and to consider to what extent the training and operational assurance regime contributed to the operational effectiveness of Fire Control.

Based on the comments made to me during the watch meetings I believe that Fire Control staff do feel integrated within North Wales FRS and recognise the efforts of CMT and the Chief Fire Officer in this regard, but that they feel there is more work to do.

The concerns raised by JFC staff over being located within a Police facility were not replicated in the North Wales Fire Control.

Fatigue arising from the long night shift is a cause for concern. The rest facilities within the JCC are not at the same standard as on fire stations. The observations I made in the summary of the JFC section of this report apply equally to the North Wales Fire Control in respect of the management of fatigue and risk.

Staffing levels are an issue although the recruitment of 4 temporary staff to bring the staffing level across the 4 watches to 28 FTE has had a positive impact. I am strongly of the view that these roles should be established and make a recommendation to that effect. I believe there is also a case for conducting an in-depth analysis to identify if

the overall number of FTE within Fire Control should be increased further to actively increase numbers on days. The reasons are twofold, Firstly, to match peak demand and secondly to facilitate a structured skill development and maintenance program which accounts for the unique challenges faced by Fire Control in delivering training and other developmental activities on shift. I recognise that this is one of the drivers for recruiting the 2 FTE flexi watch but from what I understood they often cover for unplanned absences to maintain minimum staffing rather than increasing minimum staffing. Increasing the flexi watch by a further 2 FTE (for example) would undoubtedly have a positive impact on day shift staffing levels.

There would be merit in the Service considering the re-introduction of the Crew Manager (Control) role. I do not make a substantive recommendation to that effect, but I do believe it is worthy of consideration to facilitate succession planning and to ease the transition from Firefighter (Control) to Watch Manager (Control). However, the Watch Manager progression pathway has real potential to address the concerns raised equally effectively so is worth the investment in time and effort.

There has clearly been an investment in time and effort from CMT in improving the operational assurance process for Fire Control, but some policy gaps remain. CMT should work with the Group Manager Response to identify policy gaps through recourse to the operational assurance process and to address them as expeditiously as possible. This process should be formally captured within the Operational Assurance policy to ensure it is embedded and future proofed.

Fire Control staff should have confidence in the mechanisms through which they can make suggestions for improvement. CMT are clearly committed to progressing suggestions however implementation is not always within their control. This should not be a barrier to engagement from Fire Control, but consideration should be given to expectation management through regular updates on progress or otherwise.

In summary, as with the JFC, I have no reason to doubt that the North Wales FRS Fire Control delivers its core functions effectively. I also have no reason to doubt the professionalism and competence of the staff. To the contrary, the attitude and commitment of all North Wales FRS Fire Control staff I met with was exemplary.

The Service should continue to fully engage with Fire Control staff to draw on their considerable experience and enthusiasm to improve organisational performance and allow Fire Control to reach its full potential.

Recommendations

Night shift durations in JCC exceed that set out within HSE guidance and do not allow for sufficient rest in between night shifts. The ability for North Wales FRS Fire Control staff to have meaningful rest is limited by the existing accommodation provision and the likelihood of being recalled during the rest period. There is no suitable and sufficient risk assessment in place to address the risk of excessive fatigue as there is no practical proactive control measure that can be reasonably employed. Extended rest periods impact on the amount of time available for on shift training.

Recommendation 1: North Wales FRS should ensure shift durations do not exceed 12 hours.

The recruitment of an additional 4 Firefighter (Control) posts has had a positive impact on staffing levels. These roles should be made permanent.

Recommendation 2: North Wales FRS should increase the Fire Control watch establishment to 28 FTE

Call volumes are higher during the day than overnight. The Training Manager is conditioned to a day duty system and is therefore available to deliver structured training to supplement individual skill maintenance training on day shifts. To maximise the effectiveness of the Training Manager role the flexi team should be deployed on day shifts. Variable staffing with more Firefighters (Control) on duty during the day is in operation in Fire Controls across the UK. Increasing staffing on day shifts may be able to be achieved by reducing minimum staffing on night shifts however it may require additional roles beyond the current establishment and that recommended in the previous recommendation. This would need to be established through in depth analysis of demand and training and development needs. In either event it could be achieved through the increase in FTE on the flexi team.

Recommendation 3: North Wales FRS should undertake an in-depth analysis of operational demand and Fire Control staff training and development needs with a view to increasing staffing levels on day shifts to deliver greater operational capacity to meet demand and to create greater opportunity for quality training and development activity.

Acknowledgements

I would like to place on the record my thanks to the following people:

Area Managers Matt Jones, South Wales FRS and Geraint Thomas, Mid & West Wales FRS and Assistant Chief Fire Anthony Jones, North Wales FRS for their support throughout the inspection process.

Group Manager (Control) Natalie Pearce and the JFC Control Management Team for arranging and hosting the inspection fieldwork at the JFC.

Group Manager (Control) Ros Thomas and the North Wales FRS Control Management Team for arranging and hosting the inspection fieldwork at the Rhyl secondary control and subsequent follow up meetings at the JCC.

Robert Scott QFSM, HM Chief Inspector of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, for the peer review of the report.