

Culture and values in Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service and North Wales Fire and Rescue Service – Media briefing

Date & Time	Monday 11 March 2024 – TBC
Journalists	ITV Wales – TBC BBC – TBC
Format	Pre-recorded
Venue	Virtual or in person in CP2
Press Officer & others attending	Redacted – Section 40
Summary	<p>ITV News has spent over a year exposing claims of misconduct at multiple fire services in the UK. Last month, the Welsh Government appointed four commissioners to take over the running of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service. This followed a damning report by Fenella Morris KC, which revealed persistent levels of staff misconduct, a dysfunctional workplace culture and serious failings in management at all levels.</p> <p>Since then, we have been meeting with the Mid and West Wales and North Wales fire and rescue services to discuss the Morris report and its recommendations. Both have now agreed to carry out an independent review to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake an assessment of the organisation’s current position in relation to Fenella Morris KC’s findings and other relevant studies regarding workplace culture; staff satisfaction and motivation; staff engagement; promotion arrangements; grievance arrangements; and workforce diversity. • Consider the outcomes of work already commissioned by both organisations in these areas, such as staff engagement surveys and focus groups and the next steps proposed in response. • Identify and prioritise opportunities for improvement, with indicative timelines for implementation. • Engage fully and openly with current and former staff and with other interested parties as part of the above. • Produce a report which will be published in full, expect for any details which may identify individuals. <p>The Mid and West Wales and North Wales fire and rescue services are expected to make an appointment as soon as possible, and to publish a report no later than autumn 2024.</p>

Key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Welsh Government is committed to taking forward the important lessons that the South Wales FRA culture report contains for other Fire and Rescue Services, and the wider public sector. There is no place for such a culture in the fire service nor in any other organisation. • We have sought and received from the Chairs of North Wales FRA and Mid and West Wales FRA urgent and detailed assurance on six key themes arising from Ms Morris KC's report: inclusiveness and non-discrimination; staff satisfaction; staff engagement; promotion arrangements; grievance arrangements; and the roles of the Authority and senior management. • We will consider this next report in detail and discuss with both North Wales and Mid West Fire and Rescue Authorities how they plan to implement the reports recommendations and how they will be accountable for doing so. • The Welsh Government does not run the fire service. We expect fire service management to manage their staff fairly and well, and we expect fire authority members to show leadership and to hold management to account. Where that doesn't happen there may be a case for government to take further action. • Thank all those who show the courage to speak out about their experience. That is absolutely vital to tackling problems like this.
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Top lines

- **We want all fire service staff and firefighters to feel safe in their place of work.**
- **There is no place for toxic cultures in workplaces or in Wales.**
- **I welcome the independent reviews in Mid and West and North Wales fire and rescue services.**
- **We will continue to support all Welsh fire and rescue services and authorities to make their workplaces inclusive and welcoming.**

Q&A

Why has it taken you this long to take action after appointing commissioners nearly a month ago? Concerns were raised about other fire services at that time.

- As soon as the Morris report was published, I said I would reflect urgently on the extent to which similar issues were present in Wales' two other fire and rescue services.
- In my statement on **9 January**, I urged the other fire and rescue services, and indeed other public services, to read and reflect on the report as an example of how badly wrong things can get if issues of good governance and management are neglected.
- On **19 February**, I met with the chief fire officers of Mid and West Wales and North Wales fire and rescue services and the chairs of the fire and rescue authorities to discuss the Morris report and its recommendations. I sought assurances about the culture and values at these organisations and set out my expectations about workplace culture in the services.
- Both organisations have already embarked on comprehensive programmes to review and improve their organisational cultures.
- While there are some examples of good practice in both services, I continue to receive correspondence from current and former employees of both organisations painting a picture of an inappropriate workplace culture, including allegations of bullying, sexual harassment and favouritism in promotion.
- It is now time for them to carry out more in-depth reviews, which are led independently.
- We will continue to collaborate with other UK administrations on a common response where appropriate. For instance, we have already worked with the Home Office to introduce more stringent criminal record checks for recruits to the FRS, and we hope also to develop a UK-wide barred list of firefighters dismissed for gross misconduct.

Are you only doing this now after a media campaign showing the culture of North and Mid & West Wales Fire and Rescue Services?

- NWFRA and MWWFRA are doing this because the public need to be re-assured about the culture and related management practices in our fire and rescue services and staff need to be assured they have a safe and effective means to share their experiences – good and bad – within their organisation.
- Reform and cultural change is a long process.
- The media has helped to shine a light on these failures in South Wales. An independent review ensures that any underlying issues of culture are properly investigated.

Yet initially you resisted calls for Wales-wide review. Why is that?

- This is not a Wales-wide review.
- MWWFRA and NWFRA are rightly seeking independent assurance of their own actions, values and practices in light of developments in South Wales.

How much will this review cost and who will be paying for it?

- That is a matter for MWWFRA and NWFRA, which will be meeting all of the costs.

Who will be leading the review?

- That is a matter for MWWFRA and NWFRA.

How will you ensure that the report is truly independent?

- I expect both to be completed by someone of suitable standing who has no prior connection to the FRS.

What findings do you expect from the reports in North Wales and Mid and West Wales?

- I am not going to prejudge the results.
- I expect them to yield an independent assessment of the culture and values of those organisations.

Are you planning to appoint commissioners to oversee NW and MWW fire services to?

- There is no evidence to justify that or any other form of Welsh Government intervention at the moment.

Giving evidence at the Equality and Social Justice Committee last month, the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser and Inspector for Wales seemed to suggest there is no need for a Wales-wide review. Has he been advising the Deputy Minister?

- The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser has never advised me against a cultural review of MWWFRS and NWFRS.
- What the CFRA said to the Committee is that his published thematic reviews to date have concentrated on operational issues rather than cultural ones.

How are you engaging with the Unions?

- It is clear that we need to work together to ensure that everyone at all levels in the fire and rescue service fully understand the behaviour that is required of a modern progressive public sector organisation.
- The Fire and Rescue Service Social Partnership Forum on 11 March [today] was dedicated to a discussion about the findings of the Morris report and its implications for fire and rescue services across Wales.
- I am also discussing the potential of a TUC-facilitated event to discuss the Morris report.

Will you / the Welsh Government comment on or influence the report before publication?

- No.

In the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service review, Ms Morris was not asked to investigate whether failures had affected service delivery. Will this issue be considered in the new reviews?

- This will be a matter for MWWFRA and NWFRA

Are you confident in the ability of the Commissioners to restructure and reform the management of the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service?

- Yes.
- The Commissioners are doing important and valued work to implement the changes needed at South Wales Fire and Rescue Service.
- They have full powers to restructure and reform Service management and instil a positive, non-discriminatory culture. They will remain until the Service is demonstrably an inclusive and welcoming workplace for all.
- An interim Chief Fire Officer has been appointed by the commissioners and a permanent Chief Fire Officer post will be advertised and appointed as soon as possible.

What about the state of SWFRS? Haven't the Deputy and Assistant CFO both recently walked away?

- The commissioners have full powers to restructure and reform the management of the Service and to instil a positive and non-discriminatory culture. They will remain in post until the work is finished and regularly update me with their progress.
- It is important to remember that this will not be done overnight and will take time to achieve.
- The commissioners are dealing with the issues raised through the Morris report whilst also ensuring operational command continuity.

Are you concerned about and were you aware of the allegations of inappropriate behaviour coming out of Mid and West Wales FRS?

- Any form of harassment, bullying or discrimination in the workplace is unacceptable. Sadly it happens occasionally in most large organisations, and we rightly expect management to deal with it swiftly and robustly. The problem with SWFRS was that there were serious systemic failures of management and governance which tolerated misconduct and other forms of bad practice. The issue for these reviews is to give assurance that the same is or is not so in MWWFRS and NWFRS.

Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill

Lines to Take (short version)

Key messages

- The Senedd Cymru (Electoral Candidate Lists) Bill is part of a package of reforms to deliver our commitment to a make the Senedd a more effective legislature for, and on behalf of, the people in Wales.
- The Bill delivers on the recommendations made by the Special Purpose Committee (SPC) on Senedd Reform, which were subsequently endorsed by a majority of Senedd Members in July 2022 and reflects a commitment in the Co-operation Agreement between the Welsh Government and Plaid Cymru.
- In 2003, Wales became the first legislature with 50 per cent women – but that figure has slipped, we want and need to build it back up.
- Women are an under-represented majority in Wales making up 51 per cent of the population but just 43 per cent of MSs **and 31 per cent of candidates at the last Senedd election.**
- More women in the Senedd will better reflect the gender make-up of Wales, which is good for politics, good for representation, and good for policy making.

- Evidence from Ireland, Europe, and across the world shows that gender quotas are effective in bringing more women into parliaments.

Q&A

Why the (three month) delay in publishing the Bill?

- We identified further work to be undertaken on the Bill and its supporting documentation. This work has taken a little longer than anticipated, but we are confident that the Bill is now ready for scrutiny by the Senedd.

Why has there been a change in Member in Charge of this Bill?

- The Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip is leading the Bill on behalf of the government.
- Decisions on Lead Minister are always a matter for the government.
- **My [DMSP] focus is immediately on the fire service.**

Why is Welsh Government persisting with a Bill that the Llywydd says is out of competence?

- The Government is taking forward the will of the Senedd.
- The Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip has made the statement, that in her view, the provisions of the Bill would be within the Senedd's legislative competence.
- The Llywydd has reached a different view.
- Given that these reforms originated with the Senedd itself, we believe it is right to return this matter to the Senedd itself for consideration.
- The way to do that is to put the Bill before the Senedd for Stage 1 scrutiny, for Members to decide, with the benefit of the committees' considerations, whether the Bill should progress further or not.
- If the committee is confident that we should proceed to further stages, then we will do so.