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Copies of any advice, briefing, submission or assessment prepared for Ministers since 1 January 2026 on the criteria for ending the intervention and returning the Authority to local control, including any advice underpinning the Cabinet Minister's written statement of 13 July 2026 announcing the continuation of the intervention until after the 2027 local government elections.

Any ministerial submission, advice, briefing or recommendation prepared in reliance upon the report when deciding to extend the intervention until after the 2027 local government elections.

24 June 2026

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Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

From:

Fire Services Branch
Local Government Policy Division

Cleared by:

Deputy Director

Date:

24 June 2026

MINISTERIAL ADVICE -

For decision by: Cabinet Minister for Local Government, Housing
and Planning

Copied to:

Subject	South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Intervention
100 word summary	An update on progress made by the South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Commissioners appointed in 2024, an assessment of the Service's readiness to return to local governance arrangements, and the proposed next steps.
Timing	Routine, although it would be helpful to have a decision this month to enable work on new Directions to begin.
Recommendation	The Minister is asked to: • Agree to keep the intervention in place until after the 2027 local government elections, but develop a role for FRA members alongside, aimed at developing arrangements and conditions that will provide for a smooth and effective transition in due course. • Note the resignation of Commissioner Carl Foulkes and agree that a replacement Commissioner be sought and appointed. • Agree that officials should instruct lawyers to amend the South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (Exercise of Functions) (Wales) Directions 2024 ("the 2024 Directions") to reflect the change in Commissioners (SLR-1022).

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	Agree to pay £3,000 to cover independent advice from Cardiff University on the options to mitigate the risk of ineffective transition and £3,562 to cover final costs associated with WLGA producing new FRA member role descriptions and a training and development package.
Decision report	This decision does require a Decision Report, which may be published following the issue of a Written Statement setting out the change to the South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Commissioners as reflected in the amending Welsh Government Direction.

ADVICE

Background

1. In February 2024 the previous Government intervened in South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (SWFRA), replacing Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) members with four directly appointed Commissioners tasked with making significant and sustainable improvements to the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS). The intervention followed a damning independent report from Fenella Morris KC that found evidence of significant dysfunctional culture throughout the FRS, including discriminatory attitudes and behaviours at all levels including senior management, and a failure of the FRA itself to hold senior managers to account. All of the functions of the FRA were given to Commissioners who were also tasked with delivering against specific terms of reference which included the implementation of all the Fenella Morris recommendations as well as improvements in operational delivery and firefighter safety.

2. As a result of the failures in SWFRA and concerns about the performance of FRAs more broadly, and their governance arrangements across Wales (including the Senedd Equality and Social Justice Committee Report [Sound the Alarm](#)) the former Government consulted on proposals to improve the governance and accountability arrangements in FRAs in Autumn 2025. The consultation resulted in the making of the Fire and Rescue Services (National Framework and Variation of Combination Schemes) (Wales) Order 2026 in March which made changes to the membership and budget setting arrangements for FRAs.

3. Changes to FRA membership (which require each constituent local authority to appoint 1 FRA member from their executive, with additional members being appointed directly by the Welsh Ministers) came into force on 1 May in respect of SWFRA. For the remaining two FRAs (North Wales, and Mid and West Wales), membership change will come into force on 7 May 2027, after the local government elections. The different date for SWFRA was predicated on:

- positive indications from the Commissioners about progress against their terms of reference, and their estimation that they would be able to hand over a service capable of continuing its improvement by that date, and
- a desire to not extend the intervention longer than necessary.

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- the need to ensure that the restoration of local control is sustainable and will not allow the previous failings to recur.

Recent developments

4. To prepare for transition Commissioners appointed Professors Rachel Ashworth and Catherine Farrell from Cardiff University to support the development of a new governance framework and constitution in readiness for the new FRA. In the course of this work however they have identified challenges with the timeline for restoring local control. They believe strongly that withdrawing Commissioners this year could put continued progress at risk. The Commissioners support these views.

5. They have made significant progress against their terms of reference with several of them being fully delivered. For instance, the Commissioners have implemented a new false alarms attendance policy, have reviewed historic grievance cases, and have put in place a new senior management team. They have also implemented a substantial number of the culture review recommendations.

6. However, a number of key areas have not been fully delivered, and since taking up post the Commissioners have identified other significant areas of failure across the service. These include issues identified through a whole service inspection by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services in England (HMICFRS). HMICFRS have undertaken a further review to assess progress against their recommendations. Whilst their latest report has not been published yet initial feedback indicates that there has been some progress but there remain further improvements to be made against the causes for concern that were identified in their original report. The Commissioners' view is that all of their recommendations and wider improvements do not need to be fully implemented before they can withdraw, but the organisation needs to have the foundations in place to continue to take this work forward once the Commissioners exit.

7. The evidence from Professors Ashworth and Farrell indicates that the foundations for improvement are not yet strong enough to withstand the transition back to local control. The organisation has become heavily accustomed to working to the Commissioners, and replacing them with a councillor-led FRA will amount to a fundamental change in outlook and accountability. Professors Ashworth and Farrell believe that leadership, structures and systems are new and still need time to mature to ensure that improvement in SWFRS can be sustained. They also point to the upheaval of a two-stage transition process (with councillor members and additional members being appointed at different stages during the year).

Options and Analysis, Including Risks

8. [The Fire and Rescue Services \(National Framework and Variation of Combination Schemes\) \(Wales\) Order 2026](#) requires each constituent Local Authority to appoint one executive member to SWFRA from 1 May 2026 (10 local authority members in total), and a duty on Welsh Ministers from 1 May 2026 to appoint five independent "additional" members. Some local authorities have nominated their members. However, the 2024 Directions intervening in SWFRA and appointing the Commissioners currently remains in force and local authority

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executive members currently being nominated to the FRA will not have any functions until the Ministerial Direction is revoked or amended.

9. There are three key Options in response to the concerns that have been raised in paragraphs 6 and 7:

- **Option 1** - The Cabinet Minister could continue with plans to return South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS) to local control by revoking the Direction and transferring control to the new FRA at some point in 2026.
- **Option 2** - Keeping the intervention in place until after the 2027 local government elections with the Commissioners continuing to undertake the executive functions of the FRA, with no involvement from councillor or additional members.
- **Option 3** - Keeping the intervention in place until after the 2027 local government elections with Commissioners continuing to undertake all of the executive functions of the FRA but developing a role alongside that for the local government FRA members aimed at developing arrangements and conditions that will provide for a smooth and effective transition.

10. Option 1 would be consistent with the dates set out in the Order. However, the issues raised by Professors Ashworth and Farrell have led the Commissioners to reassess their progress and the sustainability of change to date. Whilst they have made significant progress in several key areas, their terms of reference have not been fully delivered, and they do not believe that the organisation is mature enough yet to sustain and continue to deliver the change required without the additional governance and strategic leadership that they provide.

11. Officials share those concerns. Overall, the evidence strongly suggests that, despite some progress, the recovery is not yet clearly sustainable and could well not survive a return to local control. Withdrawing Commissioners on this timescale would be hard to justify and could carry considerable risk of renewed service and management failure. In other words, the rationale for appointing the Commissioners remains valid now: we cannot be fully assured that the quality of culture, management and leadership in South Wales is sufficient to ensure the consistent delivery of effective fire and rescue services.

12. Options 2 and 3 appear more likely to yield a sustainable recovery in the longer term. Under both options Commissioners would retain executive functions until at least June 2027 with their exit contingent upon further improvement. New terms of reference would need to be developed to reflect additional improvement targets that focus on ensuring the organisation is prepared for transition, and which encompass some of the additional risks that the Commissioners have identified since being in post.

13. Option 2 is the Commissioners' preferred approach. It offers stability for the service, and an opportunity for the senior leadership team to further establish itself and its key internal decision-making arrangements under certain and stable conditions. It is the simpler, cleaner option to deliver and has lower cost implications for the FRA.

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14. However, it does continue to exclude local authorities from any involvement in the delivery of fire and rescue services in South Wales, including the preparations for the introduction of new governance arrangements in which local authority Cabinet members will have a key role. It would also necessitate members of the FRA, currently being nominated by local authorities from their Cabinet as required by the 2026 Order, to be removed from office almost immediately, or to be in post but without any functions to exercise, without any fault on their part.

15. Option 3 is preferred by Professors Ashworth and Farrell, and by the Leader of the Welsh Local Government Association and the Spokesperson for the Workforce. It provides the opportunity for councillors to have a key role in designing the governance arrangements that they, or new local authority members, will work within in the future. Those members will bring their expertise and experience of delivering executive functions in a local authority into the design of the new constitution. Doing so would also rebuild the relationship between SWFRA and its constituent local authorities again.

16. Commissioners have raised concerns regarding additional costs required to manage a role for councillor members alongside the Commissioners, and the potential for confusion for staff and for councillor members themselves regarding roles and responsibilities. Any additional costs however would be minimal and to avoid the potential complication and confusion we would work with the Commissioners and local authorities to clearly define roles and responsibilities.

17. Overall, we believe that Option 3 provides the most effective approach to mitigating the risks Professors Ashworth and Farrell and their colleagues have identified, and that the Commissioner concerns with this approach can be managed appropriately.

18. There are several tasks that councillor members could be invited to support, including the development of a new constitution and related working practices that are consistent with the new governance arrangements; and giving senior management experience of working with executive members for the first time. The Commissioners might also call on the members in an advisory capacity to test some of their strategic decisions.

19. If the Cabinet Secretary is content to proceed on the basis of option 2, officials will develop new terms of reference for Commissioners and consider in more detail the role that FRA members could undertake in parallel to support the transition process.

Ministerial appointments to SWFRA

20. Neither of options 2 and 3 set out above proposes a role for additional members appointed by Welsh Ministers.

21. We see additional members as having a key role under new governance arrangements across Wales. They can bring specialist expertise which is especially important in providing leadership on what are often highly technical matters and in holding senior officers to account for delivery and can provide balanced and independent input unencumbered by any unintentional local predisposition. Officials would propose continuing with preparations to recruit additional members (such as

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developing job and person specifications), with a view to advertising the posts and making appointments in 2027 once the likely timetable for withdrawing the Commissioners is clearer.

22. However, the value of making such appointments earlier than that is questionable. While it is possible to define a useful role for councillor members alongside Commissioners in preparing for a return to local control, it is harder to do so for additional members. The Commissioners already bring extensive and proven experience of senior leadership in different fields, and it would be difficult to conceive of how five additional members could add to that. It is also difficult to justify having five additional members as well as four Commissioners and 10 local authority FRA members, when one of our key aims during the governance consultation was to reduce the number of FRA members to provide for more efficient and effective decision making.

Resignation and Replacement of Commissioner Carl Foulkes

23. The four Commissioners, Baroness Wilcox of Newport, Kirsty Williams, Vijith Randeniya and Carl Foulkes were appointed as Commissioners based on their experience in political leadership and decision making, governance and scrutiny in local government, and management of emergency services as well as a strong background in equality, diversity and inclusion.

24. After 2 years in the role, and because of other personal commitments, Carl Foulkes, former Chief Constable of North Wales Police, has tendered his resignation as Commissioner for personal reasons and will leave that role at the end of July.

25. The remaining Commissioners' preferred position would be to replace Mr Foulkes if the intervention continues until after the 2027 Local Government elections, citing concerns about Commissioner capacity if their number is reduced. Based on our regular interaction with the Commissioners we agree with their concerns and support the replacement of Mr Foulkes.

26. If the Cabinet Minister agrees that a replacement is appropriate, officials will discuss criteria and potential replacements with Special Advisors. Mr Foulkes is the former Chief Constable of North Wales Police. His former position has meant that he fully understands the nature of strategic leadership of an emergency service. That has been an invaluable asset when combined with the experience of the other Commissioners. We would therefore advise that any replacement is drawn from a similar background if that is possible.

Amending the Direction

27. The South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (Exercise of Functions) (Wales) [Directions](#) 2024 do not have an expiry date and so remain extant until they are revoked by a further direction. Keeping the Commissioners in post until after the 2027 Local Government elections therefore does not require a Direction amendment itself.

28. However the 2024 Directions provide for the functions of SWFRA to be carried out by nominees of the Welsh Ministers ('the Commissioners') who are named in the

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2024 Directions themselves. If they are not revoked, the Directions will therefore need to be amended to:

- remove Carl Foulkes as a Commissioner with effect from 31 July 2026,
- add any new Commissioner agreed by the Cabinet Minister (paragraphs 25-26 refer).

29. The Cabinet Minister is asked to agree that officials should instruct lawyers to amend the 2024 Directions to reflect the above.

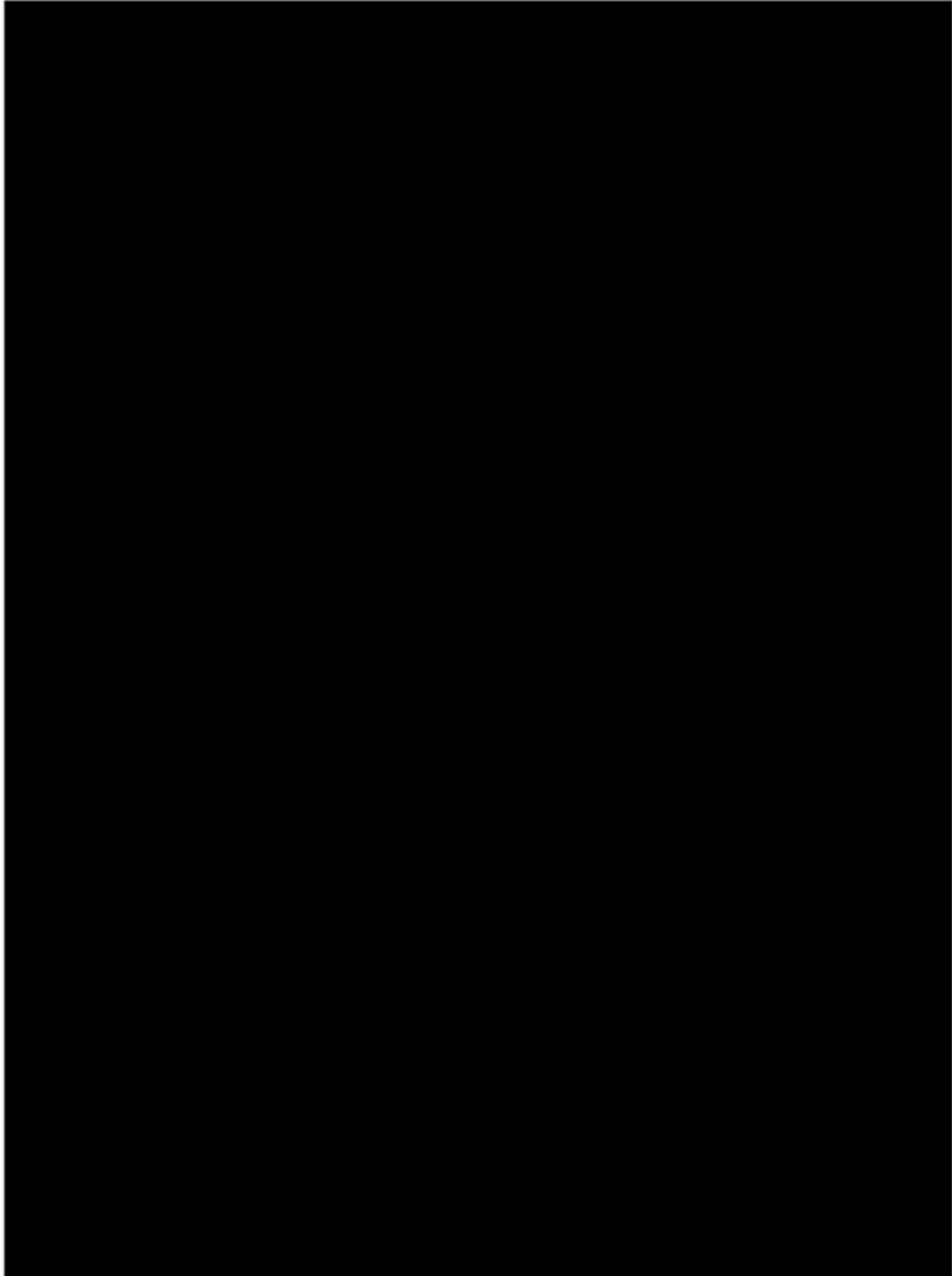
Financial implications

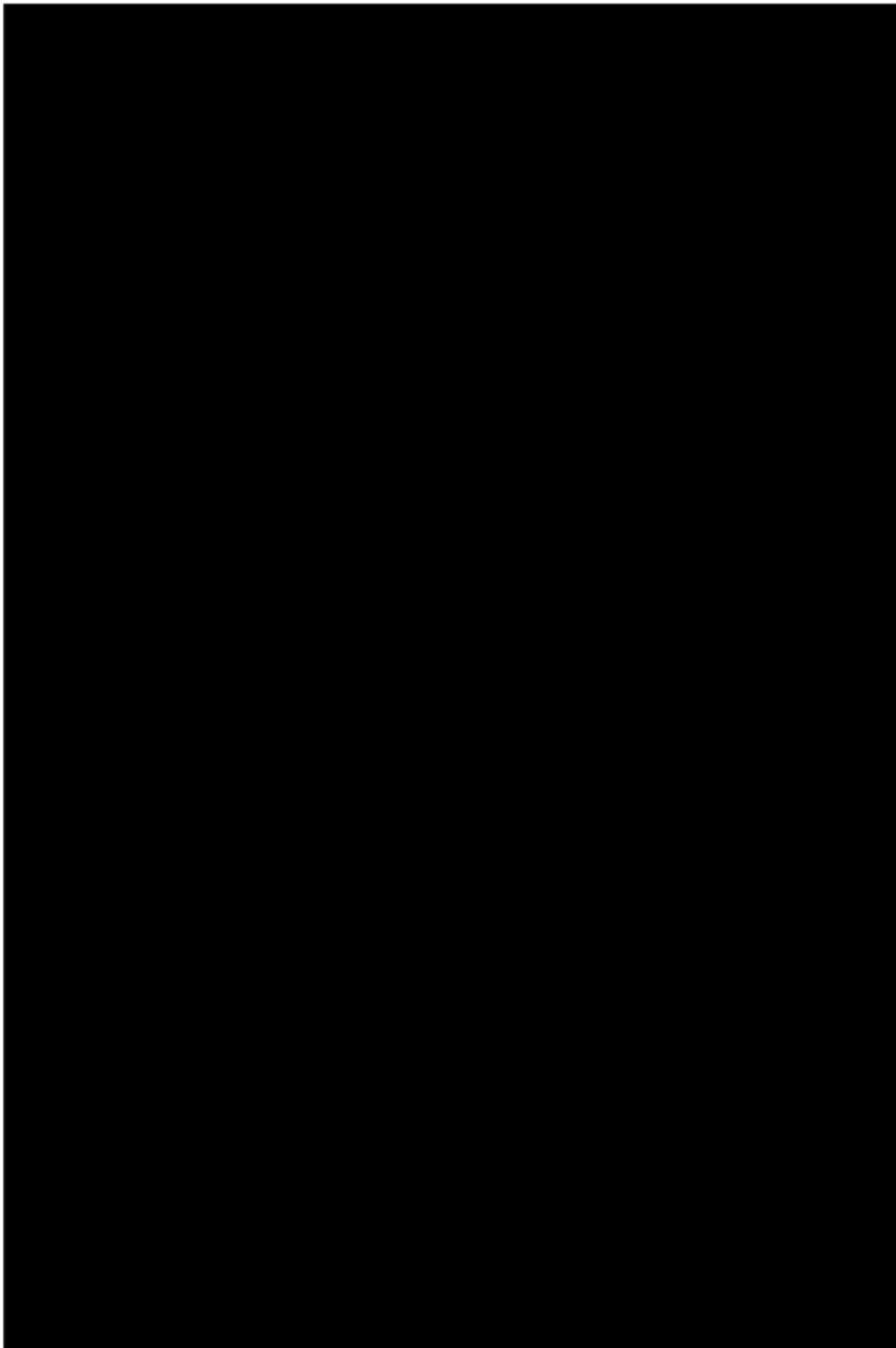
30. There are no costs for the Welsh Government in respect of running the intervention. These costs are met by the FRA itself as is appropriate and usual for any intervention. Commissioners are paid £550 per day. Based on an input of 1 day a week the costs of continuing the intervention for a further 12 months would be in the region of £100,000. There may be costs associated with FRA member remuneration, this will be dependent on the member remuneration determination by the Democracy and Boundary Commission Cymru. We anticipate these being minimal given the limited role that FRA members will have.

31. The costs of intervention have been met by the FRA, on the basis that the original failings were of its making, and that doing so creates an incentive to recover as soon as possible. Those costs include the costs of support from Cardiff University to develop a new governance framework and constitution in readiness for the new FRA. There are, though, separate costs associated with the advice that Cardiff University have provided to officials in respect of the options for mitigating the transition risks they have identified. These amount to £3,000. There are further costs of £3,562 relating to WLGA's completion of new member roles and a member training and development package commissioned by the Welsh Government to complement governance reform and the transition in SWFRA. This new package will support SWFRA transition in due course but will be of benefit to all three FRAs in Wales as part of the introduction of governance reform in the coming year. Officials believe it is reasonable for these costs be met by the Welsh Government.

32. These costs can be met from within the FRS Budget Expenditure Line 1265 (within the Local Government Planning Main Expenditure Group).

Legal issues, powers & statutory duties





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Communication or media handling

54. We will need to advise the Commissioners and local authorities of the Cabinet Secretary's decision as soon as practicable so that work can be undertaken with the Commissioners on their new terms of reference and to provide clarity to local authority Leaders and FRA members on their role. Given the previous level of