

Any correspondence between Welsh Government officials and the report's authors relating to the report's conclusions, recommendations or publication.**14 April 2026**

SWRA Governance Review Findings

Hi [REDACTED]

The Commissioners have shared a summary of the findings of your review with us this week and have suggested that it would be helpful for us to have a meeting with to go through them with you in more detail. Are you available next week by any chance. We would like [REDACTED] to be there but he is off this week. I am working on the assumption that [REDACTED] will wish to attend as well and that does significantly reduce our availability so just wondered whether you are free for any of the following slots:

23 April - 9:00-9:30 or 11:30-12:00

24 April - 13:30-14:30

Thanks

[REDACTED]
Llywodraethu, gelluogwydd ac ymateb / Governance, Capability and Response
Y Gengen Gwasanaethau Tân / Fire Services Branch
Grŵp Addysg, Dwylliant a'r Gymraeg / Education, Culture & Welsh Language Group
Llywodraeth Cymru / Welsh Government
Swyddfa Merthyr Tudful / Merthyr Tydfil Office
Ffôn / Tel: [REDACTED]
E-bost / Email: [REDACTED]
www.llyw.cymru / www.gov.wales / fire

20 April 2026

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 20 April 2026 16:59
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: Confidential note

Hi [REDACTED]

Looking forward to catching up on Thursday.

The Commissioners mentioned you would like sight of the note we prepared for them.

We are happy to share in confidence but we would prefer to do this on Thursday if that's OK.

It's just because we discussed the issues with the Commissioners in a meeting first and then followed up with the note afterwards and we think it works best that way around. Otherwise the note won't quite make sense without the context, given that some of the more sensitive aspects/elements of feedback are better discussed.

We can always supply more information after the meeting too to supplement the note if needs be.

Hope that's OK for you and see you on Thursday!

With best wishes – dymuniadau gorau.

21 April 2026

RE: Confidential note

Hi [REDACTED]

No worries. That is absolutely fine. Look forward to seeing you on Thursday.

Thanks

[REDACTED]
Llywodraethu, galluogwydd ac ymateb /Governance, Capability and Response
Y Gangen Gwasanaethau Tân /Fire Services Branch
Grŵp Addysg, Diwylliant a'r Gymraeg /Education, Culture & Welsh Language Group
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Swyddfa Merthyr Tudful/Merthyr Tydfil Office
Ffôn/Tel: [REDACTED]
E-bost/Em: [REDACTED]
www.llyw.cymru/tan / www.gov.wales/fire

24 April 2026

Meeting

Hi [REDACTED]

Good to see you yesterday.

I was wondering if we should fix a meeting up for our team and yours in early May so we could present the contents of our report for you (particularly the options analysis) and then take into account any feedback you have before sending it in?

How about Weds 6th? Would that work for you all? I think most of our side can make that date. I am just double checking.

With best wishes – dymuniadau gorau,



Email | E-bost: [REDACTED]

7 May 2026

(no subject)

There are problems with how this message is displayed. Our help is here if it is not possible.

Security: Confidential SWRA Update WD 0705 Final 002

09/05/26

With best wishes – dymuniadau gorau,



Email | E-bost: [REDACTED]

Phone | Ffôn: [REDACTED]

Fax | Ffacs: [REDACTED]

Preparing for a new South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

Rachel Ashworth, Rebecca David-Knight, Catherine Farrell and
Dave McKenna
May 2026



Cardiff Business School
Ysgol Busnes Caerdydd

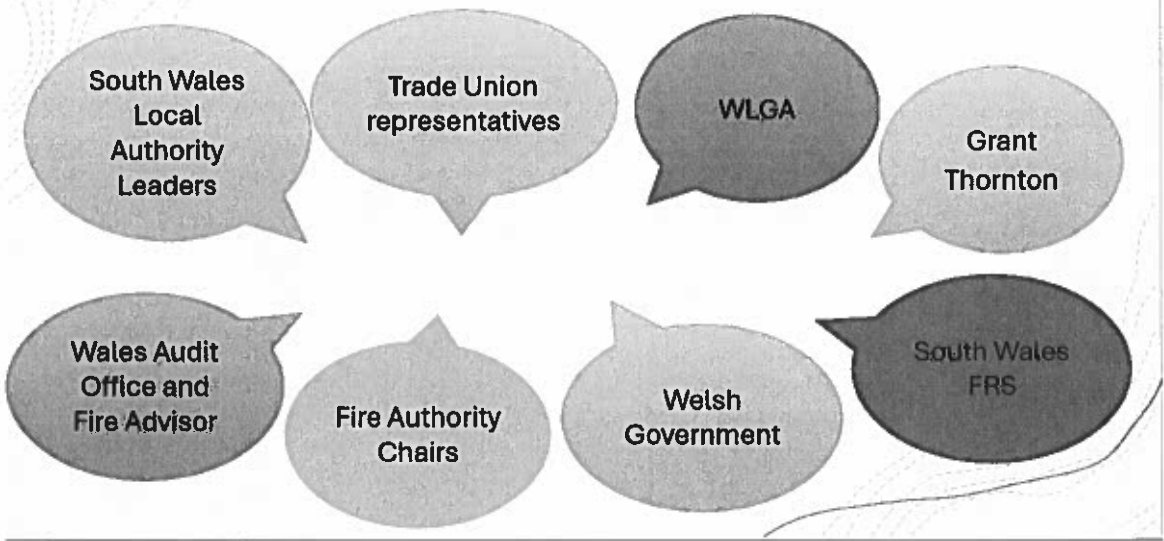
Scrutiny Solutions



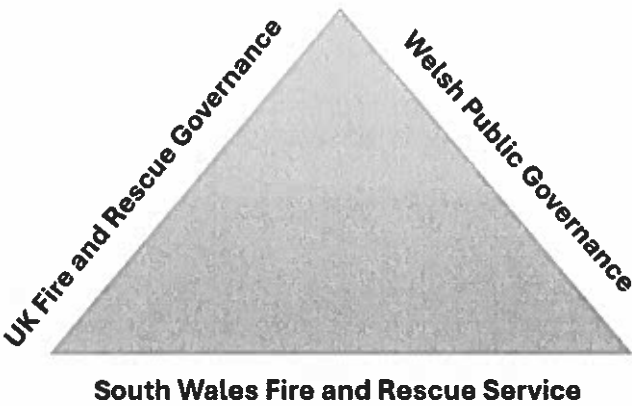
Outline for the session

- ✓ Our work to date
- 🧠 The goal - a new integrated governance system for fire and rescue in Wales
- 📋 Challenges, complexities and risks
- 📅 Proposed next steps
- Additional mitigations

Intelligence gathering - listening and triangulating



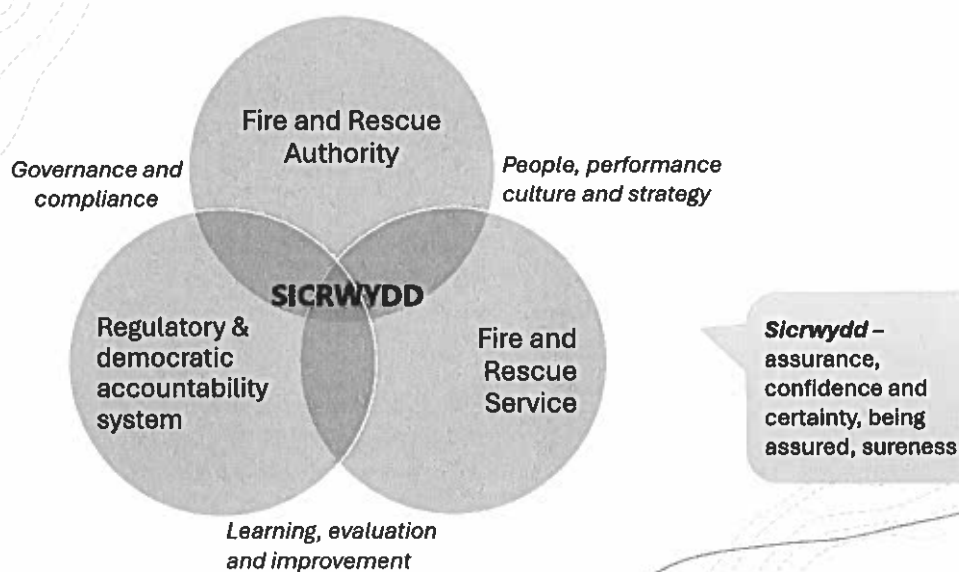
Intelligence gathering – insights from 3 main sources



A significant opportunity



A new governance system with sicrwydd/assurance at its heart



But Welsh FRAs face significant and known challenges

System-wide governance issues

Service-wide operational challenges

Gaps in wider regulatory framework

Service invisibility



Additional complexities and risks for SWFRA



- + Phased governance transition
- + Current state of play at SWFRS
- + Impact of ongoing strategic planning processes (e.g. emergency cover review)
- + Delicate stage of intervention process

Together these present a severe compound risk of setting the new FRA, its members, the FRS and Ministers up to fail

Design principles for a safe and smooth transition

Efficacy – will the model deliver good governance (CIPFA Good Governance Framework)?

Readiness – has the service improved sufficiently and is it ready for governance change?

Viability – will key stakeholders be able to fulfil their roles?

Efficiency – are we being mindful of value for money?

Democracy – are we connecting to local communities?

Safety – have we reduced complexities and risks to a sufficient degree?



Proposal: Commissioners plus FRA Transition Committee

- + *Commissioners to be retained for 12 months* from May 2026-May 2027, with their exit contingent on further improvement
- + *Elected members to form an FRA Transition Committee*, chaired by an elected member, that could meet 3-6 times between May 2026 and May 2027
- + *Clear division of responsibilities:*
 - + SWFRA Commissioners to govern service
 - + Transition Committee members to plan and agree constitutional arrangements for the new FRA
- + *Outcomes-focused* – revised improvement plan underpinned by theory of change to indicate level improvement required by May 2027 for transition to proceed
- + *Resources:*
 - + Transition Committee members supported through combination of SWFRS and home authority and advised by combination of constitution consultants, FRS and WLGA
- + *Contingency* – alternative plans prepared for May 2027 depending on improvement



Six priorities for support and risk mitigation May 2026 - May 2027



Additional evaluation of FRS – to assess progress and so new FRA has data on latest 'state of play', especially on key risk areas such as sexual harassment (HMICFRS and EHRC)



Enhancing basic managerial capabilities - mentoring/coaching for SLT, training for middle managers on transparent, risk-informed decision-making, WAO support on VFM, governance and audit



FRA preparations– officer support arrangements, training and development (emphasis on EDI, risk-informed decision-making, cultural risks, assurance mapping), and member evaluation process

Six priorities for support and risk mitigation From May 2026 - May 2027



Relationship building – between FRS and local government, aided by Transition Committee and a more outward-focused FRS SLT



Social partnership – firmer commitment to social partnership and agreed preferred option for engagement within constitutional structure



Maximising transferability – working with MOs and Chairs across Wales to identify regional variations and potential for cross-working

Recommendations

Manage	risks by adopting an interim model that provides ongoing stability for the service and is subject to improvement monitoring
Initiate	a Commissioner plus Transition Committee model from June 2026 where Commissioners govern while local authorities support the development of the new FRA
Sustain	progress through an updated improvement plan and by addressing six priorities areas of support for the FRS, Commissioners, Transition Committee and future FRA.

**Diolch am wrando/
Thanks for listening!**

Cwestiynau/questions?



7 May 2026

Touch base

Hi [REDACTED]

I am off on leave from lunchtime today but back in early next week. Shall we have a quick chat re: options? Just so we are on the same page, using same terms etc.

Also, I meant to say the 6 suggested priorities for support were suggestions and very much crafted from an ideal world perspective. It sounded like an awful lot when you replayed them back (!) and as you said work has been happening in relation to each of them but it goes without saying we are mindful that everything has to be resourced and feasible etc. etc.

Speak soon,

[REDACTED]

With best wishes – dymuniadau gorau,

[REDACTED]

12 May 2026

Confidential – Options

Hi [REDACTED]

Thanks for the chat earlier!

Have attached my shortlist – would you be able to double check it for me please? Feel free to amend if needed.

Thanks!

With best wishes – dymuniadau gorau,

[REDACTED]

Email to Ebon: [REDACTED]

Options going forward

1. Retain the current timetable and proceed exactly as planned May 2026
2. Initiate slight delay and formally re-constitute the FRA in May 2027
3. As 1 but with interim appointment of Commissioners as additional members
4. Provide additional support to the FRS/FRA. Range of sub-options include:
 - 4a. As 1 but with FRA members undertaking the executive role from May 2026 with Commissioners playing a role as advisers
 - 4b. As 2 but retaining Commissioners in executive capacity with cabinet members forming Transition Committee to plan for reset of FRA in May 2027
 - 4c. As 2 but retaining Commissioners in executive capacity with FRA members 'shadowing' for 12 months until full reset of FRA in May 2027
 - 4d. As 1 with FRA members undertaking the executive role from May 2026 with a different kind of intervention support

12 May 2026

Re: Confidential Options

① Please find this as Confidential
It may be possible to remove this if it is not required for the future report

Hi [REDACTED]

Thanks for this and your doc does include all of the options we discussed earlier. I am conscious though that when we spoke I tried to shoehorn all of the option variations into the Commissioners' original 4, but on reflection I'm not sure that works and I wonder if it just works better to include a 5th which is modified intervention. I've therefore just reorganised the options in your doc under these headings below. I appreciate that we are not being clear about 5c and what form that modified approach may take. It is something that we are still to think about in more detail.

1. Retain the current timetable and proceed as planned - May 2026
2. Extend the current intervention to post the Local elections in 2027
3. As 1 but with interim appointment of Commissioners as additional members
4. Provide additional support - As 1 but with FRA members undertaking the executive role from May 2026 with Commissioners playing a role as advisers.
5. Modified Intervention
 - a. As 2 - retaining Commissioners in executive capacity but with cabinet members forming Transition Committee to plan for reset of FRA in May 2027
 - b. As 2 - retaining Commissioners in executive capacity but with FRA members 'shadowing' for 12 months until full reset of FRA in May 2027
 - c. As 1 - with FRA members undertaking the executive role from May 2026 but retaining Commissioners with a different kind of intervention support (option to do so with CIL members only or with full FRA inc additional members)

Hope this helps
Thanks
[REDACTED]

12 May 2026

Re: Confidential Options

[Redacted]

Hi [Redacted]

Yes I also thought 4 was becoming a little congested!

Brill, thank you - will crack on!

With best wishes - dymuniadau gorau,

[Redacted]

Email | Ebost
Phone | Ffôn
Fax | Ffacs: 4 [Redacted]

13 May 2026

From: [Redacted]
Sent: 13 May 2026 14:13
To: [Redacted]
Cc: [Redacted]
Subject: RE: Confidential Options

Hi [Redacted]

We have had a catch up with [Redacted] from the WLGA this morning. We need to meet again as soon as possible (probably before the end of next week) to discuss your paper. There are a number of Commissioner engagements with LA Leaders and the WLGA coming up swiftly afterwards and we will need to discuss the options with Commissioners and WLGA officers and decide what can be shared with wider LG colleagues in time for those interactions.

You mentioned yesterday that you hoped to get the paper to us early next week. Will you be able to do that by close of play on Tuesday. If so we can start looking at dates in the latter part of next week. Appreciate we are talking about really tight deadlines so apologies for trying to pin things down so specifically.

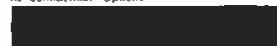
Thanks

[Redacted]

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Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government
Swyddfa Merthyr Tudful/Merthyr Tydfil Office
Ffôn [Redacted]

13 May 2026

Re: Confidential - Options



13 May 2026 10:10:10 AM
From: [redacted] <[redacted]>
To: [redacted] <[redacted]>
Subject: [redacted]

Hi [redacted]

Yes no problem and if we can get it to you beforehand, we will!

With best wishes = dymuniadau gorau,



Email | E-bost

Phone | Ffôn

Fax | Ffacs: 4

18 May 2026

Briefing



18 May 2026 10:10:10 AM
From: [redacted] <[redacted]>
To: [redacted] <[redacted]>
Subject: [redacted]

Hello [redacted]

Hope you had a good weekend. What a dismal Monday this is!!

Anyway, here is a draft of our briefing note. Obviously we have had to do this quickly, but we have ensured it is evidence based and strikes a balance in terms of recommending a way forward, while being sensitive to the situation.

Please take a look through it and let me know if you have any queries or if you would like to double check anything. We are happy to make slight adjustments and send it back to you tomorrow if needs be.

Hopefully I have caught all the typos etc. but you never know!

Hope it's helpful to everyone.

With best wishes = dymuniadau gorau,



South Wales Fire and Rescue Governance Transition:

Options and Next Steps

**Rachel Ashworth, Rebecca David-Knight, Catherine Farrell
and Dave McKenna**



Scrutiny Solutions



Summary

The executive functions of South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (SWFRA) have been held by a team of Commissioners since 2024. In May 2026, these functions were originally due to be transferred to a newly configured SWFRA, comprising a mix of locally elected and additional (lay) members. This governance model is new to fire and rescue in the UK, with its implementation in South Wales coming ahead of a wider rollout across Wales in May 2027.

Having been appointed to support the preparations for this constitutional change, we have been developing thinking around an integrated governance model for fire and rescue along with initial proposals for a new SWFRA constitution. However, in the course of this work we have identified a series of challenges linked to the timeline for governance transition. It is our firm view that these challenges present a severe compound risk to a future SWFRA and to the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS).

This briefing document outlines those challenges in more detail. It also provides a review of a series of options and identifies potential next steps with the aim of achieving a safe and smooth transfer of executive functions and ensuring the effective implementation of the new FRA governance model, while sustaining continuous improvement at SWFRS.

Our options analysis illustrates the strengths and weakness of each proposed course of action and highlights the risks associated with proceeding with the current timetable. Nevertheless, it has been possible to identify an option that could provide a way forward, enable us to maintain stability and mitigate risks while planning for the transition to a new SWFRA.

We are recommending the option - *Modified Intervention with Transition Committee* – which stipulates that South Wales Fire Authority executive functions should remain with a team of Commissioners for a further 12 months, while a Transition Committee, formed of nominated cabinet members from each of the ten South Wales local authorities, oversees the development of constitutional arrangements for implementation in May 2027.

This recommended option is contingent on the achievement of an adjusted set of continuous improvement outcomes by May 2027, which are currently under discussion within the service. We also suggest that there is an opportunity to focus collective stakeholder attention on six priority areas (see p. 10) to provide further support to the SWFRA between May 2026 and May 2027.

This approach facilitates the development of a democratic model of constitutional change and assists progress towards an integrated governance system for fire and rescue in Wales centred around 'sicrwydd' (assurance). It should also provide us with the collective confidence to envision, by 2028, a fully functional and confident SWFRA, clear on its role and responsibilities and focused on providing robust post-intervention assurance of fire and rescue services for the people of South Wales.

1. Background

The executive functions of SWFRA have been held by a team of Commissioners since 2024. A newly configured FRA comprising elected and additional members is due to be implemented in South Wales in May 2026, ahead of a wider rollout across Wales in May 2027.

Our team was appointed in December 2025 to support the preparations for constitutional change. The proposed FRA governance model is new to UK fire and rescue, as it involves a mix of elected and additional (lay) members, and so we engaged in extensive intelligence gathering. This included reviewing three sets of documentation related to: i) South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, ii) UK fire and rescue governance: and iii) other forms of public governance in Wales.

We also held meetings with a range of stakeholders, including: the Commissioner team, managers and leaders from South Wales Fire and Rescue, South Wales Local Authority leaders, Welsh Government, Trades Unions representatives, Wales Audit Office, Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser and Inspector for Wales, FRA specialists from Grant Thornton, Mid and West Wales Fire Authority and North Wales Fire Authority.

2. Findings

It is evident that this governance transition presents an important chance to 'reset' the SWFRA and SWFRS. Equally, we have a significant and **once in a generation opportunity** to develop an integrated and distinctive system of fire and rescue governance for the whole of Wales.

Drawing on the CIPFA's seven principles of good governance¹ and working in line with the 'Three Lines of Defence' model (originally designed for internal audit), it is possible to envision an integrated governance model for fire and rescue oriented around the concept of 'sicrwydd'.

¹ CIPFA International Framework for Good Governance in the Public Sector <https://www.cipfa.org/en/our-work/public-sector/standards/international-framework-good-governance-in-the-public-sector>

When translated into English, *sicrwydd* means *assurance, confidence and certainty, being assured, a sense of sureness*. Our findings indicate that, in the past, reliance has been on *signs of reassurance*, rather than *assurance*. The future delivery of good governance of fire and rescue in South Wales and beyond will depend on our ability to orient our collective activities toward *sicrwydd* and our capacity to adopt this as a guiding principle.

Figure 1 (Appendix) presents the three pillars of the fire and rescue governance system, their governance responsibilities, and role in providing a line of defence. The FRS has responsibility for operational functions, the FRA ensures oversight of management activity, and the external regulatory and democratic accountability system provides independent and objective assurance. The collective and system-wide emphasis on *sicrwydd* ensures a common purpose.

We have been working on outline proposals for an FRA constitution that would accelerate our progress towards an effective integrated governance model. However, our intelligence gathering has indicated that it will be very difficult for SWFRA to meet its assurance responsibilities if we proceed with the proposed timetable for governance transition.

This is due to a series of challenges that, when taken together, form an acute, compound risk. These challenges include:

1. *Long-standing difficulties for FRAs* – FRAs provide a strong democratic link to local communities but have suffered a series of impediments in the delivery of good governance². These include: the difficulties in accessing independent, comparative data; a lack of dedicated officer support; mixed motivations for nomination and membership; and the potential for 'capture' by the service. Taken together, these difficulties leave FRAs vulnerable to the under-estimation of risk and the proposed transition point reduces our chances of addressing them ahead of time.
2. *Phased FRA appointments and onboarding* – team cohesion and a collective sense of purpose are vital to the delivery of good governance³. This was recently illustrated by Audit Wales' review of National Parks (with the same proposed membership model as the new SWFRA) which highlighted poor implementation in practice leading to gaps in capability, clarity, culture and continuity⁴. With 2/3

² Ashworth, IL and Ferrell, C. 2018 Review of FRA Accountability and Finance in Wales, for Welsh Government.

³ Ashworth, IL and Downo, J., 2021. Building Accountability Amidst Ambiguity: A Contemporary Challenge for Public Servants. In *The Palgrave Handbook of the Public Servant* (pp. 1219-1237). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

⁴ [https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/Governance of National Park Authorities 1.pdf](https://www.audit.wales/sites/default/files/publications/Governance%20of%20National%20Park%20Authorities%201.pdf)

of (elected) FRA members appointed in May 2026, 1/3 (additional) FRA members appointed autumn 2026 and local elections in May 2027 prompting a further shift in membership, the staggered appointment process for SWFRA will limit its effectiveness at a time when SWFRS needs sustained governance oversight. Plus, this will be costly (e.g. repetition of onboarding 3 times within a year).

3. *Progress at SWFRS* – the initial intervention at SWFRS was focused on leveraging improvement in leadership and governance with specific attention to people, culture and behaviour. Commissioners have brought stability, aided by the arrival of a new Senior Leadership Team. Some important progress has been made but there is clearly more to do. Feedback from stakeholders including Audit Wales, Wales Fire and Rescue Inspector and Adviser, HMICFRS and the Trades Unions has prompted the Commissioners and the FRS SLT to identify new priorities for action, while continuing to monitor those specified previously⁵. While the FRS may have ‘turned a corner’, this evidence suggests that it is not yet in a sufficiently strong position to be the first UK FRA to transition to a new governance system.
4. *Strategic planning* – strategic planning processes inevitably straddle a period of governance transition but the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) is particularly significant strategically as it has the potential to inform Emergency Cover Review recommendations relating to emergency coverage across South Wales. The current timetable means responsibility for this would ‘land’ on new FRA members before they are ‘up to speed’ with the service and their role. This will inhibit their capacity to provide the robust and effective oversight and governance required for such a significant set of strategic decisions.
5. *Intervention process* – cultural, organisational and behavioural change takes some time and hence why often intervention processes tend to stretch over time, often a 3-4 year period in total⁶. SWFRS finds itself at the 24-month point, a fragile stage often associated with over-optimism⁷, plus new priority areas have been identified for action⁸. Implementing an untested governance system and de-escalating intervention at this critical juncture without the benefit of local political renewal⁹, could place additional pressure on the new FRA, risking the prospect of cultural regression and an intervention setback.

⁵ <https://hmi-frs.justice.nps.gov.uk/publication.html/inspection-of-south-wales-frs-effectiveness-efficiency-and-people/>

⁶ <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/130975-road-recovery-evaluation-evidence-intervention-en.pdf>

⁷ As above

⁸ <https://hmi-frs.justice.nps.gov.uk/publication.html/inspection-of-south-wales-frs-effectiveness-efficiency-and-people/>

⁹ See 4.

3. Options analysis

Cognisant of the potential risks around timing, the aims are to achieve a safe and smooth transfer of executive functions and ensure the effective implementation of the new FRA governance model, while sustaining continuous improvement at SWFRS. A range of options has been identified for consideration in line with these objectives. These are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: SWFRA Governance Options

<i>1. Proceed as planned</i>	Work to current timetable with new FRA model implemented and executive functions transferred from Commissioners to FRA in May 2026
<i>2. Proceed with Commissioners on FRA</i>	As 1, but with Commissioners appointed as additional members to serve on FRA between May 2026 and autumn 2026
<i>3. Proceed with Commissioners as advisers</i>	As 1, but with Commissioners acting as advisers to FRA members and no executive functions.
<i>4. Intervention extension and FRA members stood down</i>	Extend the current intervention period with FRA members stood down until May 2027 local elections.
<i>5a Modified intervention with Transition Committee</i>	As 2, with Commissioners retaining executive functions and cabinet members forming a Transition Committee to plan FRA reset in May 2027
<i>5b Modified intervention with shadowing</i>	As 2, with Commissioners retaining executive functions and FRA 'members shadowing' until full reset of FRA in May 2027
<i>5c Modified intervention with adapted Commissioner role (partial FRA)</i>	As 1, with executive functions transferred to FRA members (elected only) and Commissioners fulfilling a modified intervention support role
<i>5d Modified intervention with adapted Commissioner role (full FRA)</i>	As 1, with executive functions transferred to FRA members (all) and Commissioners fulfilling a modified intervention support role

We have given each option careful consideration, drawing on available evidence and our intelligence gathering. In doing so, we have evaluated the options against a set of design principles, which are provided in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Design Principles

Efficacy – will the option support the effective delivery of sicrwydd and good governance following the 7 principles of the CIPFA Good Governance Framework¹⁰ and an integrated model for Wales? Does it enable the critical conditions required, such as a collective sense of purpose, independent support, robust data, confident oversight?

Readiness – has the level of improvement within the FRS reached the required sufficiency to enable a smooth transition? Have we guarded against early optimism? Can the FRS/FRA demonstrate the level of risk-informed decision-making required for a transition to the new governance model?

Democracy – does the option support a strong connection to the local communities that are served by SWFRS? Do elected members have a meaningful and substantive role to play within the option?

Viability – will key stakeholders be able to fulfil their responsibilities and roles effectively? Will they be willing to take on specific tasks? Will elected members have appropriate support to undertake their role? Can we maximise any structural landing points?

Efficiency – are we delivering good value for money for the taxpayer? Are we maximising efficiencies? Can we avoid duplicating activity, such as the delivery of member development and onboarding, or blurring the roles of Commissioners and FRA members?

Safety – this is an aggregate measure based on each of the above principles. Have we addressed the compound challenges to a sufficient degree? Have we minimised risks as far as we can?

Table 2 (below) presents a summary of the assessment of each option against the design principles. Each of the options has been evaluated 'high', 'medium' or 'low' against the design principles, with 'high' indicating the strongest capacity to mitigate challenges, and 'low' demonstrating the weakest capacity to mitigate challenges. The final principle, Safety, provides an overall assessment for each option.

¹⁰ CIPFA International Framework for Good Governance in the Public Sector <https://www.cipfa.org/policy-and-guidance/standards/international-framework-good-governance-in-the-public-sector>

Table 2: Options Analysis Summary

	Efficacy	Readiness	Democracy	Viability	Efficiency	Safety
<i>1. Proceed as planned</i>	L	L	H	L	L	L
<i>2. Proceed, with Commissioners on FRA</i>	L	L	H	L	L	L
<i>3. Proceed, with Commissioners as</i>	L	L	H	L	L	L
<i>4. Intervention extension and FRA members stood down</i>	M	H	L	L	H	M
5a Modified intervention with Transition Committee	H	M	M	H	H	H
<i>5b Modified intervention with shadowing</i>	L	M	M	L	L	L
<i>5c Modified intervention with partial FRA and adapted Commissioner role</i>	L	L	H	L	L	L
<i>5d Modified intervention with full FRA and adapted Commissioner role</i>	L	L	H	L	L	L

The options analysis demonstrates the risks associated with proceeding with the current timetable. For example, despite rating highly for the maintenance of a strong democratic connection with elected politicians playing a leading role on the FRA from May 2026, Options 1-3 rank lower on efficacy and efficiency due to the disruption and duplication of process involved with the repeated enrolment of different sets of members. The low score for service readiness reflects the current state of play at SWFRS and concerns around the safe transfer of oversight functions to the FRA. This means that, overall, the options ranked poorly on the aggregate safety principle.

Suffering some of the same limitations, Options 2-3 and 5b-d, also have low scores for viability. This is partly on the basis that key stakeholders, such as cabinet members and commissioners, may be unwilling/unable to undertake the role as specified, and partly because of the anticipated difficulties in implementing such complex governance arrangements within the prescribed timeframe and on a temporary basis.

Option 4 is ranked medium overall even though it most closely resembles the status quo. This is due to the limited scope for democratic engagement given FRA members would be stood down for a further year, plus concerns around viability given the likely difficulties associated with reversing the process for cabinet member selection which is now underway.

4. Recommended Option – Modified Intervention with Transition Committee

On the plus side, the analysis highlights Option 5a as a potential way forward. Like other options, Option 5a is not without risk but it achieves a better safety assessment as it presents the best prospect for mitigating risks while engaging local politicians in the process of developing arrangements for 2027.

Under this option, Commissioners would retain executive functions for a minimum of 12 months, with their exit contingent upon further improvement. We are anticipating that this would be specified in a revised improvement plan and that, given the emergence of additional areas for attention, it would likely be underpinned by a wider model of improvement.

Elected members would play a significant role on an FRA Transition Committee tasked with a separate function to the Commissioners - overseeing the development of the new FRA constitutional arrangements. This Committee could meet between four and six times per year and would be chaired by an elected member.

Some discussion would be required regarding the coordination of the Transition Committee's work programme and wider resourcing, given that the Commissioners and the Transition Committee would be operating in tandem. It is imagined that support would be provided through a combination of stakeholders including SWFRS, WLGA, Welsh Government and the 10 local authorities.

As stated above, these arrangements would need to be underpinned by a revised improvement programme, along with a post-intervention assurance plan, plus a contingency arrangement for May 2027, should the improvement threshold not be reached.

5. Supporting a safe and smooth transition to a new SWFRA

If the recommended option is adopted, there would be an opportunity between May 2026-May 2027 to prioritise actions that would help to minimise ongoing risks and assist a smooth transition to a new SWFRA in 2027.

Based on our stakeholder conversations, we have identified the following areas for action:

- *Assessing SWFRS progress* – the new Welsh Fire and Rescue Inspection regime is due to be operational from Jan 2027, while HMICFRS and the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) could assist in providing up to date evaluations of SWFRS. Organisations like Grant Thornton may also be helpful in presenting evidence on improvement and an independent baseline for an incoming FRA.
- *Capacity-building at SWFRS* – there is a need to maintain support for capacity-building, including professional development for managers (e.g. on risk-based decision-making), a continuation of training provided by Academi Wales, Audit Wales expertise on budgeting and VFM, as well as ongoing peer coaching/mentoring for SLT.
- *FRA preparations* – mindful of the limitations to the FRA model and with WLGA playing a leading role, attention could be focused on how we prepare elected and additional members for the task ahead. This would include planning dedicated officer support arrangements, training and development (with specific reference to EDI and assurance mapping), and member evaluation processes.
- *Social partnership* – there is vocal support for social partnership in South Wales, along with an appetite for greater engagement. There is less clarity on the form this could take but there is an opportunity between May 2026-May 2027 to firm up commitments to social partnership and consider appropriate models of engagement in line with the new constitutional arrangements for 2027.

- *Relationship building* – the relationship between SWFRS and local authorities has been described as a distant one with a view that the service is somewhat ‘out on a limb’ relative to others. There is a chance to strengthen relationships ahead of the 2027 SWFRA reset in line with SWFRS SLT’s ambitions to be more outward-focused and aided by members of the Transition Committee.
- *Wales-wide transferability* – the recommended option means that all three Welsh FRAs would move to the new FRA model in May 2027. There will inevitably be some regional variations but this period offers scope to consider the potential co-creation of Wales-wide FRA governance systems and structures, as has been suggested by FRA Monitoring Officers (e.g. a national Standards Committee).

6. Concluding summary

This briefing document has outlined the challenges ahead, reviewed relevant options and identified potential next steps with the aim of achieving a safe and smooth transfer of executive functions and ensuring the effective implementation of the new FRA governance model, while sustaining continuous improvement at SWFRS.

Our options analysis demonstrates the risks associated with proceeding with the current timetable. Importantly it also highlights an option that could provide us with a potential way forward that maintains stability, mitigates risk and facilitates planning for the new FRA.

Our recommended option - *Modified Intervention with Transition Committee* – means SWFRA executive functions would remain with a team of Commissioners for a further 12 months, while a Transition Committee, formed of cabinet members from each of the ten local authorities, oversees the development of SWFRA constitutional arrangements for implementation in May 2027. As we have emphasised, our recommended option is contingent on the achievement of a revised set of improvement outcomes for SWFRS May 2027.

We are recommending the implementation of this option, in conjunction with a revised improvement plan and focused collective stakeholder attention on the six priority areas for support, on the basis that this maximises the chances of addressing the challenges we have identified and mitigating the risks associated with the upcoming FRA governance transition.

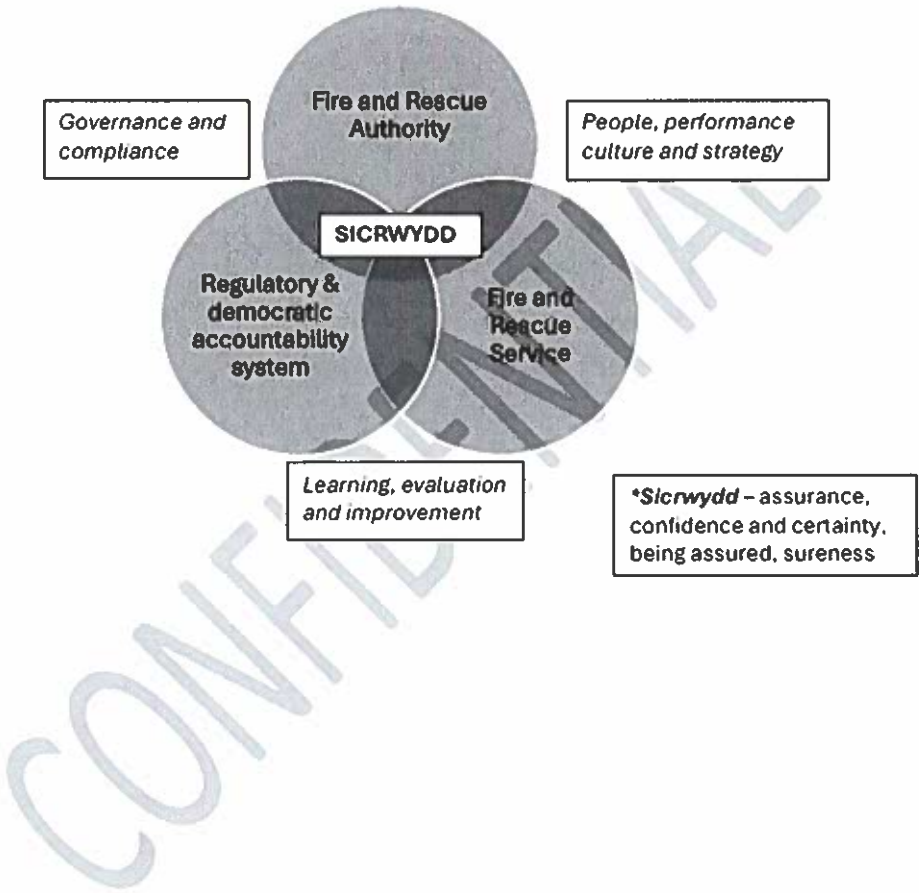
Finally, this approach facilitates a more participative model of constitutional change that assists progress towards an integrated governance system for fire and rescue in Wales centred around sicrwydd. It also gives us confidence to envision, by 2028, a fully functional and confident SWFRA, which is clear on its role and responsibilities and

focused on providing robust post-intervention assurance of fire and rescue services for the people of South Wales.

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Appendix

Figure 1: An integrated governance system for fire and rescue in Wales focused on sicrwydd



19 May 2026

Re: Briefing

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Hi [Redacted]

Yes, no problem. It's fine to share with the parties you mentioned on a confidential basis.

With best wishes = dymuniadau gorau.

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