

23 September 2026

Dear

Complaint in respect of ATISN 27262 – Water Bombing Aircraft – INTERNAL REVIEW

Thank you for your e-mail which we received on 20 August. Your e-mail indicated that you were dissatisfied with the response you received from us on 20 August in respect of your request for information dated 25 July. I have now concluded my review with apologies for the slight delay in replying as this has taken longer than was at first anticipated. Your original request asked for:

1. The current number, type, and operational availability of water-bombing aircraft or helicopters held or contracted by your department or any agency under your authority.
2. Copies of any policies, guidance, or operational criteria governing when aerial firefighting resources may be deployed.
3. Any assessments, reviews, or risk analyses conducted since 2020 regarding the adequacy of aerial firefighting capability in light of increased wildfire activity.
4. Any inter-governmental or cross-agency agreements relating to the provision, funding, or deployment of aerial firefighting assets.
5. Records of all occasions since 2020 when aerial firefighting support was requested, approved, denied, or delayed, including reasons for any delays.
6. Any planned procurement, feasibility studies, or budget proposals relating to establishing a dedicated UK, Welsh, or Scottish aerial firefighting fleet.

Your request for an internal review covers the following:

1. Re-examine the request under EIR 2004 as the correct statutory regime.
2. Conduct fresh, documented searches across all relevant directorates, including:
 - Fire Services Branch
 - Civil Contingencies
 - Climate Change / Resilience
 - Ministerial Private Offices
 - Cabinet Secretariat
 - NRW liaison teams
3. Identify all information held, including:
 - policy documents;
 - guidance;
 - risk assessments;
 - inter-governmental agreements;
 - records of aerial support requests;
 - procurement or feasibility discussions.
4. Provide a full disclosure schedule, specifying:
 - information held;
 - information withheld;
 - exemptions relied upon;
 - public interest tests applied.

5. Provide a lawful Section 16 / Regulation 9 advisory notice, identifying specific external bodies and offering transfer where appropriate.

I have undertaken a review of the information we hold up to 25 July which is the date of your original request, including a search of our electronic filing system, which is used by all Departments across the Welsh Government, to establish whether we hold any of the information in your request and have found the following which is consistent with the position set out in the response sent to you on 20 August:

- we do not hold any assessments, reviews, or risk analysis conducted since 2020 regarding the adequacy of aerial firefighting capability in light of increased wildfire activity.
- we do not hold any inter-governmental or cross-agency agreements relating to the provision, funding, or deployment of aerial firefighting assets.
- we do not have any documents relating to any planned procurement, feasibility studies, or budget proposals relating to establishing a dedicated UK, Welsh, or Scottish aerial firefighting fleet. We have however indicated publicly that an early discussion has taken place with the UK Government and the other Devolved Governments, and the Cabinet Minister for Local Government, Housing and Planning set out her intention to review the current capabilities available to fight wildfires, including aerial support, in her Written Statement of 23 July.

[Written Statement: Wildfires in Wales \(23 July 2026\) | GOV.WALES](#)

- We do not directly contract for aerial support for tackling wildfires. Information on the helicopter support providers that sit within the Natural Resources Wales (NRW) Framework Agreement is already in the public domain and can be found here:

[View notice – Sell2Wales](#)

We do not hold information on operational availability of the resources within that Framework. That is an operational matter for the Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) and NRW to establish as and when they are needed.

I have however found some limited information in relation to your request regarding:

- Copies of any policies, guidance, or operational criteria governing when aerial firefighting resources may be deployed.
- Records of all occasions since 2020 when aerial firefighting support was requested, approved, denied, or delayed, including reasons for any delays.

I am sorry that this information was not found originally. I am providing the elements that are not exempt to you now (please see below):

The Welsh Government does not hold or directly contract for aerial firefighting assets, and we are not part of the decision-making process for the use of NRW

contracted assets. That means that we do not hold records of all occasions since 2020 when aerial firefighting support was requested, approved, denied, or delayed, including reasons for any delays.

We do hold information which indicates that the NRW assets were deployed 5 times during 2025 but do not hold any records or details of those deployments. The relevant extract is attached at Annex 2.

We hold information that indicates helicopter provision was requested from NRW by both North Wales FRS and South Wales FRS in July 2026. I have decided to apply an exception in respect of the detail of the information held under Regulation 12(5)(a) of the Environmental Information Regulations. The reasons for applying that exception is set out in Annex 1. I have however provided a summary of that information here. Provision was initially delayed because of UK-wide pressures, and became available on 24 July to North Wales FRS. The request was stood down by South Wales FRS on 24 July. This information was widely reported in the media at the time. We do not hold records of those requests. The FRSs and NRW may hold complete information relating to this matter.

We do not hold copies of any policies, guidance, or operational criteria governing when aerial firefighting resources may be deployed. We have however found one briefing document from NRW that was sent to us on 17 July 2026 that includes some information on the criteria for deployment. The relevant extract of information is attached at Annex 2.

No exceptions were applied in the response to your original request and no exceptions under The Environmental Information Regulations 2004 are being applied in respect of this response other than that referred to above and set out further at Annex 1.

Some of the information you have requested that is not held by the Welsh Government may be held by Natural Resources Wales or by the three Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales. I am sorry that contact details were not provided in the original response and I have now provided these below in line with the duties under Regulation 10 of The Environmental Information Regulations 2004:

Natural Resources Wales

Weblink: [Natural Resources Wales / Freedom of Information requests](#)

- **Telephone:** 0300 065 3000 and ask to speak to an Access to Information Officer
- **Email:** accesstoinformationteam@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk
- **Post:** Access to Information Team

Penrhosgarnedd
Bangor
Gwynedd
LL57 2DW

Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service

Weblink: [Freedom of information](#)

- **Email:** mail@mawwfire.gov.wales
- **Post:** The Freedom of Information Officer
Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service
Lime Grove Avenue
Carmarthen
SA31 1SP

North Wales Fire and Rescue Service

Weblink: [Freedom of information North Wales Fire And Rescue Service](#)

- **Email:** foi@northwalesfire.gov.wales
- **Post:** Freedom of Information Officer
North Wales Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters
Ffordd Salesbury
St Asaph Business Park
St Asaph
Denbighshire
LL17 0JJ
- Online Form - [online contact form](#)

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service

Weblink: [Freedom of Information - South Wales Fire and Rescue Service](#)

- **Telephone:** 01443 232355
- **E-mail:** InformationGovernance@southwales-fire.gov.uk
- **Post:** Information Governance
South Wales Fire and Rescue Service HQ
Forest View Business Park
Llantrisant
CF72 8LX

Next steps

I have considered your complaint in accordance with the procedure outlined in the [Welsh Government's Practical Guide for Making Requests for Information](#) which is available by post on request or via the internet.

If you remain dissatisfied with this response you have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow

Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Yours sincerely

Reg Kilpatrick / Tracey Breheny

(Job Share) Director, Local Government and Planning

Annex 1

Application of exemptions/exceptions

The Environmental Information Regulations (EIRs) provide a right for anyone to ask a public authority to make requested information available to the wider public. As the release of requested information is to the world, not just the requester, public authorities need to consider the effects of making the information freely available to everybody. Any personal interest the requester has for accessing the information cannot override those wider considerations.

Regulation 12(5)(a), Environmental Information Regulations 2004

Regulation 12(5)(a) of the EIRs reads:

(5) For the purposes of paragraph (1)(a), a public authority may refuse to disclose information to the extent that its disclosure would adversely affect—

(a) international relations, defence, national security or public safety;

Following discussions with internal colleagues, I have decided to withhold the information regarding the requests of aerial support provided at each of the local Tactical Co-ordination Group meetings, which were stood up under civil contingencies major incident arrangements to deal with the live management of wildfires following the declaration of major incidents by FRSs in July 2026.

I believe that the disclosure of this information would adversely affect both National Security and public safety. Disclosure would provide information on how operational decisions are made as to the deployment of aerial support for fighting fires. Making such information freely available would allow those parties who are looking for perceived areas of weakness to plan and co-ordinate fires to put National Security at risk by stretching resources, and thereby putting public safety at risk.

Public Interest Test

Public interest arguments in favour of disclosure

The Welsh Government acknowledges the legitimate interests of government openness and transparency that release would engender. The public have a clear interest in the ability of our public bodies to provide an effective response to tackling wildfires that can have a devastating impact on our countryside and communities. That includes how aerial firefighting support fits into that overall response, and therefore its availability during the spate conditions that have occurred this summer.

Public interest arguments in favour of withholding

Disclosure of detailed discussions on the tactical management of major incidents can risk both national security and public safety. They have the potential to provide information that could inadvertently aid individuals or groups intent on causing damage or harm to communities now or in the future. Disclosure of tactical response discussions also has the potential to complicate and confuse clear public messaging about the risks faced by the public and the action that they should be taking to keep safe, and has the potential to put public safety at risk as a result.

Balance of public interest test

Your request asks for records of all occasions since 2020 when aerial firefighting support was requested, approved, denied, or delayed, including reasons for any delays.

The Welsh Government does not hold or directly contract for aerial firefighting assets, and we are not part of the decision-making process for the use of NRW contracted. The key facts regarding the deployment of aerial support as part of the firefighting response to wildfires in July 2026 have already been widely reported in the public domain. The fact that support was delayed because of UK wide pressures, and the date that it was subsequently made available is also included in the substance of our response above. Provision of the references that were made to this at Tactical Coordination Group Meetings does not change or add to the summary position outlined in the response. It is my view therefore that the risk to national security and public safety outweighs the public interest argument in this instance.