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Reference	674A2013
Date	10 December 2013
Pages	1 of 3

Dear Simon

Improvement Assessment

In my letter of 18 September 2013 I gave my opinion on whether the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) had discharged its statutory duties in respect of improvement planning.

I am also required, under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure) to give an opinion on whether the Authority has discharged its duties in respect of improvement reporting and met the requirements of the Measure.

In my opinion, and based on audit work undertaken to date the Authority has discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Measure, although there is potential to strengthen its arrangements further.

I have reached this conclusion because:

- the Authority published an Assessment of its Performance (entitled *How did we do in 2012-13?*) before the statutory deadline of 31 October 2013;
- *How did we do in 2012-13?* assesses the Authority's performance in the preceding financial year (2012-13) and sets out how the Authority has sought to discharge its duties under the measure;
- the Assessment evaluates the Authority's success in achieving its improvement objectives and expresses its view clearly;
- the Assessment includes details of performance as measured by the National Strategic and Core performance indicators;

- the Assessment includes a section outlining the key collaborative activities the Authority is involved in and specifically around the work of the National Issues Committee (NIC) and joint working with Local Authorities and other public services; and
- the Assessment is available in English and Welsh to download from the Authority's website.

The Authority could further improve its Assessment by:

- **Using more comparative data:** very little reference is made in the document to how performance against the National Strategic and Core indicators in North Wales compares with the rest of Wales or with other parts of the United Kingdom. No local indicators are used to compare performance with other Welsh Improvement Authorities. Public perception of how the Authority performs in relation to other similar bodies will therefore be limited and the Authority is not clearly stating how well it believes it performs in comparison to others. Using more comparative performance data would help explain the Authority's achievements and future challenges.
- **Making citizens aware of the Assessment report:** the Authority has indicated that it will be advising stakeholders about the availability of the Assessment at a future date but to date limited promotion of the Assessment of Performance has taken place. It is not publicised on the Authority's home page, but located within the Improvement planning pages, and no direct action to promote its presence has yet taken place.
- **Publishing a summary of the Assessment:** no summary of the Assessment of Performance has been produced, although we understand that the Authority plans to produce a summary in the future.
- **Making the Assessment available in a wide range of formats:** signposting the public to differing formats of the Assessment of Performance, for example, in large print, Braille or differing languages as this is not included within the document currently.
- **Inviting specific comment or input from citizens and the community about the Assessment:** as this is not included within the document currently.

Further proposals for improvement

Four new proposals for improvement are being suggested in this letter. We will continue to monitor and report on the progress made by the Authority in implementing the proposals set out in my previous reports and letters.

Proposals for improvement

- P1 Ensure that the Assessment of Performance report is promoted visibly on the Authority's website and that its existence is widely publicised.
- P2 Complete and publicise the summary of the report ensuring that external stakeholders are made aware of its presence.
- P3 Ensure that the Assessment of Performance report is available in differing formats and that this availability is clearly stated in the report.
- P4 Include a section inviting specific comment or input from citizens and the community about the Assessment.
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I will undertake more detailed work on the arrangements that support the Authority's performance management and reporting over the following months and report this, as well as summarising all of my work and that of relevant regulators during 2013-14, in an Annual Improvement Report for the Authority that I will publish by the end of March 2014.

Yours sincerely,



HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS

Auditor General for Wales

cc: Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Local Government and Government Business

Lisa Williams – Performance Audit Lead