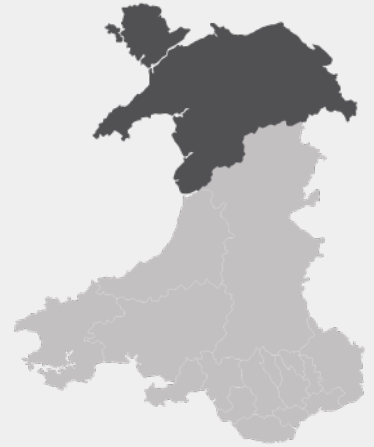


North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Annual Audit Summary 2021

This is our audit summary for North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority. It shows the work completed since the last Annual Audit Summary, which was issued in January 2022. Our audit summary forms part of the Auditor General for Wales' duties.



More information about these duties can be found on our [website](#).

About the Fire and Rescue Authority

Some of the services the Fire and Rescue Authority provides



Key facts

Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) consist of nominated elected members, representing the local authorities across the FRA area as a whole.

North Wales FRA is made up of 28 councillors who represent their political parties and their constituent authorities as follows:

- Anglesey County Council [3]
- Conwy County Borough Council [5]
- Denbighshire County Council [4]
- Flintshire County Council [6]
- Gwynedd Council [5]
- Wrexham County Borough Council [5]

The FRA spent £34.6 million on providing services during 2020-21 which is a 0.2% decrease on 2019-20¹.

¹ Source: 2020-21 Statement of Accounts

Key facts

As at 31 March 2021, the Council had £4.9 million of useable financial reserves. This is equivalent to 14.2% of the Authority's annual spending on services, the lowest of the 3 Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales.

FRA's have a statutory obligation under the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to maintain a Fire and Rescue Service capable of dealing effectively with all calls for assistance in the case of fire and other emergencies.

The Welsh Government has overarching responsibility for determining policy on FRA's. At a local level, FRA's must meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, as well as the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services, which is currently being reviewed by Welsh Government

Most of the funding for the three FRA's in Wales is received by way of a levy from the local unitary authorities within their area. The contribution is based on population numbers.

The Auditor General's duties

We completed work during 2020-21 to meet the following duties

- **Audit of Accounts**

Each year the Auditor General audits the Authority's financial statements to make sure that public money is being properly accounted for.

- **Continuous improvement**

The Authority also has to put in place arrangements to make continuous improvements, including related plans and reports, and the Auditor General has to assess whether the Authority has met these requirements.

- **Value for money**

The Auditor General examines whether the Authority has put in place arrangements to get value for money for the resources it uses, and he has to be satisfied that it has done this.

- **Sustainable development principle**

Public bodies need to comply with the sustainable development principle when setting and taking steps to meet their well-being objectives. The Auditor General must assess the extent to which they are doing this.



We continue to recognise the huge strain on public services and to work in a way that seeks to reduce the impact on public bodies' response to COVID-19, while still meeting our statutory duties.



To meet the Auditor General's duties we complete specific projects. We take the findings of our audit work into account when assessing whether the Authority has put in place arrangements to secure value for money. Our findings and conclusions are summarised below.

What we found

Audit of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's 2020-21 Accounts

Each year we audit the Authority's financial statements.

For 2020-21:

- The Auditor General gave an unqualified true and fair opinion on the Authority's financial statements on 22 October 2021, in advance of the statutory deadline.
- The Authority's Annual Governance Statement and Narrative Report were prepared in line with the CIPFA Code and relevant guidance. They were also consistent with the financial statements prepared by the Authority and with our knowledge of the Authority.
- The draft statements presented for audit on 28 May 2021 contained a large number of errors and inconsistencies.
- A number of changes were made to the Authority's financial statements arising from our audit work, which were reported to the Audit Committee and Executive Panel in our Audit of Financial Statements Report in October 2021.
- The Auditor General issued the certificate confirming that the audit of accounts for 2020-21 has been completed.

Our work in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we changed the approach and focus of our performance audit work in local government and other bodies. Below is a summary of some of the work we have undertaken in response to the pandemic across a number of sectors, much of which is of relevance to local government.

We undertook a project to support public sector efforts by sharing learning through the pandemic. The project aims to help prompt some thinking, and practise exchange. [Further information is available on our website.](#)

In March 2021, we published a [national report](#) setting out an overview of progress to date on Test, Trace, Protect in Wales. In December 2020, we also published some [observations](#) of the Auditor General on the procurement and supply of PPE during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a [report](#) in April 2021. In June 2021, we also published our [report](#) on the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme in Wales.

Continuous improvement

The Auditor General certified that the Authority has met its legal duties for improvement planning and reporting and believes that it is likely to meet the requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 during 2020-21.

Well-being of Future Generations Examination – Corporate Resilience in North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority

In 2020-21 we undertook a review of corporate resilience at the Authority to provide assurance on how well it is addressing the financial and capacity challenges it faces. Our [report](#) concluded that, overall, the Authority has demonstrated its short-term resilience but needs to take some major decisions to remain resilient in the future.

Local government studies

As well as local work at each council, each year we also carry out studies across the local government sector to make recommendations for improving value for money. Since the last annual improvement report, we have published the following reports:

Discretionary services (April 2021)

Financial pressures have led to councils reducing spending and cutting services, but the pandemic has shown local government services are essential to keeping people safe and healthy. We focussed on how councils define services, the systems and processes they have used to review services and how robust these are. Demand for some essential services is continuing to increase and councils are not confident that they can continue to deliver these services in the face of this rising and complex demand. Councils need to take the opportunity to refresh, reevaluate and reset what they do and to learn from the pandemic to build a better future. Our [report](#) was published in April 2021.

Regenerating town centres in Wales (September 2021)

Between 1950 and 1980, local authorities prioritised regeneration of town centres creating new and greater retail space. However, past policy choices, changing consumer expectations and technological advances are now adversely affecting many Welsh town centres. And the pandemic has created challenges for local government and central government, with one in seven shops on Welsh high streets now empty, despite the Welsh Government investing and leveraging in £892.6 million in the last seven years. Local authorities do not have the capacity to respond to this situation and are not always using the powers they have to help regenerate towns. To deliver the best local outcomes, policies and joint working need to be aligned and integrated, and resources prioritised on town centres. Our [report](#) was published in September 2021.

Planned work for 2021-22

We also looked at the key challenges and opportunities facing the Authority. These could have an effect on the Authority's ability to meet its legal obligations in relation to the sustainable development principle and the use of its resources.

The most significant risk and issue facing authorities and the wider public sector during 2021-22 continues to be the COVID-19 pandemic. We have shaped our work to provide assurance and challenge in a way which helps to support the Authority through this period. Our work for 2021-22 includes a review of the Authority's progress in achieving carbon neutrality.

The Auditor General is independent of government, and is appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. The Auditor General undertakes his work using staff and other resources provided by the Wales Audit Office, which is a statutory board established for that purpose and to monitor and advise the Auditor General. The Wales Audit Office is held to account by the Senedd.

The Auditor General audits local government bodies in Wales, including unitary authorities, police, fire and rescue authorities, national parks, and community councils. He also conducts local government value for money studies, assesses compliance with the remaining requirements of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 and may undertake special inspections under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021.

Beyond local government, the Auditor General is the external auditor of the Welsh Government and its sponsored and related public bodies, the Senedd Commission, and National Health Service bodies in Wales.

Audit Wales is the non-statutory collective name for the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office, which are separate legal entities with their own legal functions, as described above. Audit Wales is not a legal entity.

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English. Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to delay. Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg. Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

This document is also available in Welsh.