



Protecting the well- being of firefighters

Modern firefighters are expected to keep people safe and protect their communities. Sometimes this involves exposing themselves to dangerous situations and witnessing tragedy in their attempts to meet the expectations of the public for protection. South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, with a strategic theme dedicated to 'Valuing Our People', have made strides to ensure that while firefighters are protecting us, they are protected themselves from adverse mental and physical issues encountered on the job. To support staff and promote the well-being of firefighters, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service have designed and created 'Well-being Areas' with the sole purpose of ensuring firefighters have a safe, stable and positive space to talk openly to colleagues about the dangerous and potentially traumatic situations they find themselves in.

The Future Generations Commissioner's advice:

- The Commissioner's Manifesto for the Future states that we "need to shift the system to prioritising keeping people of all ages mentally and physically well, to enable them to live healthy and fulfilled lives";
- "We welcome your enthusiasm towards applying the Act - it's clear there is organisational commitment to contributing to Wales' seven well-being goals and the five ways of working. We would encourage you to use your influence to encourage others to adopt a similar approach... You should be considering how the decisions you're making take into account nature and the ecosystems we depend upon to survive and impact on a resilient Wales."

Feedback to South Wales Fire and Rescue Service from the Commissioner's monitoring of progress towards meeting well-being objectives



Contributes towards:



The issue

Through the course of their career, firefighters attend traumatic incidents involving fatalities and distressing situations, which has an impact on mental health. According to a survey carried out by Mind in 2019, 60.2% of fire service staff and volunteers indicated that they had personal experience of mental health problems, compared to 53.4% in 2015.



The solution

Designing a system that enables and empowers teams within South Wales Fire and Rescue Service to create dedicated well-being spaces which allow staff access to nature and can help promote good physical and mental health, as well as act as a preventative mechanism for stress and other mental health issues that may arise due to the nature of firefighters' work.



Taking care of nature while taking care of people

- Managers are encouraged to integrate green infrastructure and biodiversity enhancement in the well-being areas;
- Bug hotels and beehives have been **integrated** into the well-being areas to enhance biodiversity;



- Old equipment like helmets and fire extinguishers are being turned into planters;
- A few of the areas have kitchen gardens, which are being used to prepare healthy meals for personnel.



Taking ownership of the spaces

- A key tenet of this work has been to [involve](#) the firefighters themselves from the beginning, ensuring their views and ideas have been embedded throughout the project;
- Firefighters are encouraged to design and construct the well-being areas themselves to foster a sense of ownership and allow for places to be individually created to fit the needs of each station;
- SWFRS have also been in conversation with many people in the local community, working [collaboratively](#) with local businesses and the third sector to develop the areas;
- Some local businesses are considering following suit and creating Well-being areas of their own.



Approach

Challenge

Supporting firefighters and staff at South Wales Fire and Rescue Service with their mental well-being

Prevention

- Looking at preventing stress and trauma by talking openly and addressing issues, shifting from a culture of coping to openness

> **A Healthier Wales**

Collaboration

- Initiative has benefitted from local business and third sector organisations
- Stations encouraged to raise funds or work collaboratively with local business for donations

> **A Prosperous Wales; A Wales of Cohesive Communities**

What next?

Additional engagement with firefighters is planned to gauge the success of each station and learn for future expansion

Long Term

- Areas aim to improve long-term well-being of firefighters
- Building infrastructure for the long-term prevention of mental health issues

> **A Prosperous Wales; A Healthier Wales**

Involvement

- Firefighters have responsibility for their own areas
- Involving individual stations from the beginning of this project allowed for tailored areas that suit the needs of each unique station

> **A Wales of Cohesive Communities**

Integration

- Biodiversity has been integrated into each well-being area
- Upcycling has been a key feature of the areas as they look to contribute to the circular economy

> **A Resilient Wales; A Prosperous Wales**



The Impact

“The wellbeing area at Kenfig Hill has proven to be a very important part of station life. It has quite often been used as a break out area for crews to enjoy and to unwind in especially after the more challenging calls...The area has also proven to be a very good team bonding area, as it brings the crew closer together when maintenance and upkeep is required.”

Anthony Sperduty, Watch Manager of Kenfig Hill

