

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 16 March 2015 at Wrexham County Borough Council Chamber, Wrexham. Meeting commenced at 10.30am.

PRESENT

Councillor

M LI Davies (Chair)
P R Lewis (Deputy Chair)
A I Dunbar
B Dunn
R J Dutton
A Evans
G Lowe
D Macrae
H McGuill
P Owen
W P Shotton
D Simmons
J R Skelland
D Taylor
W O Thomas
G G Williams
R Wright

Representing

Denbighshire County Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council
Gwynedd Council
Gwynedd Council

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); C Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer); D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); R Simmons and R Fairhead (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); G W Griffiths (Training and Development Manager); G Brandrick (Senior Fire Safety Manager); K Roberts (Senior Operations Manager); S Millington (Area Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); B Millington (Deputy Corporate Communications Manager); S Forrest (Accountant, Treasurer's Department, Conwy County Borough Council); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer) and S Jones (Member Liaison Assistant).

APOLOGIES

Cllr L W Davies	Anglesey County Council
Cllr R Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr J G Evans	Anglesey County Council
Cllr C Hughes	Gwynedd Council
Cllr R O Jones	Anglesey County Council
Cllr D J Miles	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr W R Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr R E Parry	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr M A Reece	Flintshire County Council
Cllr A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2014

2.1 The minutes of the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 15 December 2014 were submitted for approval.

2.2 **RESOLVED to approve minutes as a true and correct record.**

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 16.1 Industrial Action – the DCFO informed members that the Welsh Government had announced the result of the pension consultation. Two options were consulted upon, Scheme A was effectively the same as the scheme to be introduced in England and Scheme B offered more generous early retirement terms. Scheme B had been favoured and the Minister had confirmed that this scheme will be adopted for firefighters in Wales as of 1 April 2015.

3.2 **RESOLVED to note the update.**

4 URGENT MATTERS

4.1 There were no urgent matters.

5 CHAIR'S REPORT

5.1 The report listed meetings and events attended by Cllr M Ll Davies and Cllr P R Lewis in their roles of Chair and Deputy Chair of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority between December 2014 and March 2015.

5.2 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

6 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2014-2015

6.1 The Treasurer presented the report which informed Members about the estimated provisional outturn for the financial year 2014-15. It was noted that current indications are that there will be an underspend of £143,964.

6.2 At the Executive Panel meeting in October 2014 members were informed of the potential risks associated with the new national contract for radio communication and it had been agreed that it would be prudent to set aside £300k in to a reserve to cover any additional costs. However, members were now asked to consider that any remaining underspend be set aside to cover any further, currently unknown, costs associated with the project. It was noted that the DCFO represents the three FRAs in Wales on the project board and members will receive regular updates about developments.

- 6.3 The Treasurer advised that by financing capital expenditure from the revenue budget, it would reduce future debt charges and he therefore recommended that £312k be set aside for this purpose.
- 6.4 In response to a question about the overspend of £29k on training for new recruits, it was confirmed that following the successful recruitment campaign more firefighters than anticipated had been recruited and therefore the cost of training was higher. It was also confirmed that the majority of the training is delivered in-house however where considered suitable and more efficient recruits will be sent to another provider.
- 6.5 **RESOLVED to**
- (i) set aside £312k to finance capital expenditure in order to reduce future debt charges;**
 - (ii) agree that any remaining underspend be set aside to cover communications transitional costs.**

7 HOME FIRE SAFETY CHECKS

- 7.1 The report presented advised members of the impact of the reduction in Community Risk Reduction (CRR) grant funding on home fire safety checks (HFSC) and to seek approval for a reduction in the annual target of HFSCs to be undertaken.
- 7.2 Members had previously been informed of the reduction in the CRR grant funding. Officers had been working with the other two FRs in Wales in order to ascertain which areas of work could continue to be funded with the reduced grant and it had been noted that members wanted the Phoenix project to continue, as well as maintaining the Arson Reduction Team on a reduced basis. Another area of work Members considered essential that it continue is the home fire safety checks, especially for the more vulnerable members of the community and those needing specialist equipment. It was however recognised that the Authority's current target of 30,000 HFSCs per year will not be attainable and members were asked to consider reducing the target to 20,000 per year.
- 7.3 Members were pleased that over 200,000 HFSCs had been undertaken since 2007 and expressed disappointment that the WG had decided to reduce the CRR grant. It was noted that during 2013/14 North Wales FRA had a much lower percentage in the category of 'dwelling fires where there were no smoke alarms' compared to the national average, and members were concerned at the prospect of fewer smoke alarms being available to protect the people of North Wales due to the reduction in CRR grant funding.
- 7.4 Members felt that it was important that the Minister realised the impact of reducing the grant funding and that he recognised that the grant was a means of 'spend to save' and that the preventative element of the Phoenix project, the arson reduction team and the HFSCs, had saved costs to other agencies over the years. Members also felt that the public needed to be aware that it was because of the WG's reduction in funding that there would be fewer smoke detectors available for homes in North Wales. The Clerk advised that the risk to safety could be included in the strategic risk register as a means of showing the reduction in resilience due to the funding cuts.

- 7.5 **RESOLVED to**
- (i) note the identified impacts of the reduction in both capital and revenue CRR grant funding;**
 - (ii) agree to a revised target of 20,000 HFSCs per year.**

Cllr McGuill abstained from the vote on the above.

8 PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS, TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY, INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND MINIMUM REVENUE PROVISION POLICY

8.1 Members were presented with the Prudential Indicators, Treasury Management Strategy, Investment Strategy and Minimum Revenue Provision Policy for 2015/16. The Treasurer explained that the Audit Committee has delegated power to review these documents in finer detail and this had been done at its meeting on 26 January 2015.

8.2 The Audit Committee had discussed the Reverse Repurchase Agreements (Repos) that had been added to the counterparty list, following advice from the Treasury Consultants, in order to diversify the investment portfolio. However, members of the Audit Committee had asked for further information to be presented at the next Audit Committee meeting prior to recommending the use of Repos to the Fire and Rescue Authority.

8.3 **RESOLVED to approve each of the four key elements of the report and the recommendations contained therein**

- (i) a list of prudential indicators as required by the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities;**
- (ii) the Treasury Management Strategy outlining the strategy to be followed regarding short and long-term borrowing for 2015/16 in accordance with the CIPFA code of Practice on Treasury Management;**
- (iii) the strategy to be followed regarding the investment of Fire and Rescue Authority funds;**
- (iv) Minimum Revenue Provision Statement.**

9 IMPROVEMENT AND RISK REDUCTION PLAN 2015-16

9.1 The DCFO presented the draft Improvement and Risk Reduction Plan 2015-16 to members for approval prior to publication.

9.2 Members had been involved in the preparation work during 2014 looking at risks and formulating objectives and these had had been consulted upon publicly and used for budget setting purposes. The outcome of the consultation had been discussed at the Executive Panel meeting on 2 February 2015 and members had confirmed the high level objectives for 2015-16. It was noted that following the earlier decision to reduce the HFSC target to 20,000, any reference to the number of HFSCs in the Plan would need to be amended accordingly.

9.3 The Clerk informed members that the term 'improvement plan' may need to be reconsidered by the WG in view of the reduction in resources. Members thanked officers for the excellent, detailed document.

- 9.4 **RESOLVED to approve the final draft of the Improvement and Risk Reduction Plan 2015-16 for publication on the Authority's website before the end of March 2015 SUBJECT TO amending the target number of HFSCs to be undertaken to 20,000 per year.**
- 10 STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER
- 10.1 Members were informed of plans to introduce a new strategic risk management policy and corporate risk register.
- 10.2 An internal audit review of the Authority's corporate governance arrangements had identified a need to enhance the Authority's arrangements for corporate risk management in order to embed risk management more explicitly into its decision-making. A new risk management policy and risk register has therefore been developed to identify, evaluate and manage significant risks to the Authority's strategic objectives.
- 10.3 It was noted that due to the nature of a strategic risk register it would not be appropriate or practical to present its entire contents at open meetings of the Authority. Therefore, a summary overview report would be presented to the Executive Panel at least twice annually, and in addition, the Chair and Deputy Chair will be invited to view and discuss the contents in detail with officers prior to the relevant meetings.
- 10.4 **RESOLVED to note the progress being made in developing and implementing a new strategic risk management policy, procedures, guidance and scored risk register.**
- 11 THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE'S ANNUAL REPORT TO THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
- 11.1 The Clerk presented the annual report of the Standards Committee to members.
- 11.2 **RESOLVED to note the Standards Committee's annual report.**
- 12 PAY POLICY STATEMENT
- 12.1 The report sought members' approval for the pay policy statement for 2015/16.
- 12.2 The Authority is required to produce a pay policy statement on an annual basis under Section 38(1) of the Localism Act 2011. It was noted that the statement had been amended for 2015/16 in order to comply with the revised guidance notes for 'Pay Accountability in Local Government in Wales'.
- 12.3 The DCFO informed members that there had been collaboration with the other two FRAs in Wales in preparing the statement and there had been no changes in methodology on how the pay is evaluated, merely changes to the presentation.

- 12.4 In response to a member's question about pay for apprentices, it was noted that the Service does not currently employ apprentices on operational duties but when an apprenticeship scheme is established the pay will be in accordance with the trainee scale. The apprentices currently employed in a non-operational capacity are on the NJC pay scale.
- 12.5 In response to a member's question about the wording of paragraph 4.7 of the policy statement in relation to a severance package, '*....full Fire Authority will be offered the opportunity to vote before any severance package is approved for chief officers*', officers confirmed that they will check the accuracy of the wording as per the national guidance document. Members were of the view that any severance package should have to be agreed by the full Authority, not merely have the opportunity to vote on it.
- 12.6 **RESOLVED to approve the pay policy statement for the coming financial year 2015/16 subject to clarifying wording of paragraph 4.7.**

13 MINUTES OF MEETINGS

13.1 The minutes of the following meetings were submitted for information:

- Audit Committee meeting held on 26 January 2015
- Executive Panel meeting held on 2 February 2015
- Standards Committee meeting held on 4 March 2015.

13.2 **RESOLVED to note the minutes for information.**

PART II - Pursuant to Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public were asked to leave the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business because it is likely that there would be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in Paragraph(s) 12 to 18 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Prior to moving to the agenda items to be discussed under part II, the CFO informed members that the Senior Control and Business Continuity Manager, Linda Roberts would be retiring from NWFRS on 16 April 2015. The CFO paid tribute to her work, and explained that under her guidance and leadership the NWFRS' Control had become the first proper combined Joint Communications Centre with the police control throughout the UK in 2008. Also Ms Roberts' more recent work on business continuity planning had meant the Service had been able to deal with periods of industrial action with minimum disruption to the Service and the communities of North Wales.

The CFO wished to place on record his thanks to her for her exemplary service. The Chair reiterated the CFO's words and it was agreed that a letter should be sent on behalf of the Authority to thank Ms Roberts.

14 SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT: FINANCIAL SERVICES

- 14.1 The Treasurer and Sandra Forrest left the meeting whilst this report was discussed.
- 14.2 The CFO presented the report which asked Members to approve the renewal of the service level agreements (SLAs) between NWFRA and Conwy County Borough Council for the provision of financial services and with Mr Ken Finch as the appointed Treasurer to North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.
- 14.3 It was noted that the service level agreements would run from 1 April 2015 until 31 March 2020. However, a clause will be included in the agreement giving either party the option to withdraw from the agreement should there be a re-organisation of local government in Wales.
- 14.4 One member expressed concern about the annual cost of the SLA being uprated annually in line with the retail price index, the Clerk suggested that it be amended to being uprated in line with consumer price index and this amendment was agreed by members.
- 14.5 **RESOLVED to**
- (i) approve the renewal of the service level agreements between NWFRA and Conwy County Borough Council (for the provision of financial services) and between NWFRA and Mr Finch, as the appointed treasurer to the Fire Authority; and**
 - (ii) annually agree the amount of uplift based on consumer price index not the retail price index.**

15 INDUSTRIAL ACTION

- 15.1 The CFO informed members that the WG's decision following the consultation period as discussed under matters arising had meant that there had been no further periods of industrial action in Wales. It was noted that there were still some issues to be resolved and members will be kept informed of any developments.
- 15.2 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

16 RESPONSE FROM WG ON THE REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR INDUSTRIAL ACTION

During this discussion, Cllrs W O Thomas and A Evans left the meeting.

- 16.1 The Clerk informed members that following their request at the FRA meeting in October, he had contacted the WG expressing members' concern about the cost of military assistance which had originally been offered by WG and accepted by the three FRAs in Wales under pressure from WG. However, having finalised the business continuity plans, the CFO had realised that military support was not required in North Wales and informed WG but by this time an agreement had been reached with the Ministry of Defence (MoD).

16.2 The Clerk informed members that WG had confirmed that there would be no refund but that WG had also shared the cost with the three FRAs in Wales. The Clerk advised members that he felt the value for money aspect should be challenged and this was agreed by members.

16.3 **RESOLVED to request that WG, on an all-Wales basis, challenges the Ministry of Defence about the value for money aspect of the agreement.**