

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 16 June 2014 at Conwy County Borough Council Chamber, Bodlondeb, Conwy. Meeting commenced at 10.50am.

PRESENT

Councillor

M Ll Davies (Chair)
P R Lewis (Deputy Chair)
R Davies
L W Davies
A Evans
J G Evans
J M Evans
C Hughes
D Kelly
D A MacRae
H McGuill
D J Miles
P Owen
W T Owen
R E Parry
J R Skelland
A Tansley
W O Thomas
R Wright

Representing

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

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); C P Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); G Owens (Deputy 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 Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (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

Councillor

B Dunn
A Jones
G Lowe
W R Owen
M A Reece
W P Shotton
D Simmons
G G Williams

Representing

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

Officers

L Roberts Senior Control and Business Continuity Manager

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 MARCH 2014

2.1 The minutes of the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 17 March 2014 were submitted for approval.

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

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Wrexham fire and ambulance station – the CFO informed Members that the full business case had been submitted to the Welsh Government which had been approved within the timescales and the planning Committee of Wrexham County Borough Council had approved the planning application. Cllr Skelland confirmed that he had attended the planning meeting and that it had been passed without issue and he was grateful to everyone involved for their perseverance with the project. The CFO also confirmed that there would be a turf cutting ceremony with the Ministers present and Cllr McGill made a plea for as many Members as possible to attend that ceremony to show support and as a vote of thanks to those who have worked so hard on the project.

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 March and June 2014. It was noted that the regular meeting with the Chief Fire Officer scheduled for 13 June 2014 had been cancelled.

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

6 FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE IN WALES PROJECT 2013

6.1 The Chief Fire Officer presented the report which advised Members of the current status of the Fire and Rescue Services in Wales project.

6.2 The CFO reminded Members that the report at appendix A had been issued to Members under part II conditions at the March 2014 meeting. The CFO also reiterated his concerns about the project and the recommendations contained within the report which had far-reaching implications for the Authority especially around its governance.

- 6.3 In addition to the report, Members were provided with a copy of the letter sent from the Chair of the Authority to the Minister (dated 10 February 2014) detailing several issues of concern and the Minister's response (dated 4 March 2014) that she would be proceeding with the recommendations in the report. At the meeting a copy of a letter dated 10 June 2014 from the Minister to the Chair was tabled. The letter invited "one representative from the Authority to be a member of the official-level Programme Board, which will oversee and drive forward the first nine recommendations".
- 6.4 Members shared the CFO's concerns about the report in general, the lack of consultation on the report and that a meaningful process had not been followed to reach the conclusion. The Clerk was also concerned about the background to the governance issues raised in the report.
- 6.5 In response to a question about the committee structure of the three FRAs in Wales, the Clerk confirmed that the three FRAs have different committee structures. NWFRA operates in a non-political manner and has a good record of harmonised working; the Authority has never had any issues of concern raised by the Wales Audit Office and has an excellent track record in all areas of performance including partnership working. Members felt that the Authority has a good scrutiny function operating within the Audit Committee and all key decisions are made by the 28 members of the Authority. Cllr Lewis confirmed that scrutiny is mentioned four times in the Audit Committee's terms of reference.
- 6.6 Cllr Hughes commented that the report was obviously of great concern and proposed that the Assembly Ministers for North Wales be made aware of the report and the concerns about the recommendations and the report in general. This proposal was seconded by Cllr Wright. Cllr J G Evans also proposed a similar approach with the Members of Parliament representing North Wales.
- 6.7 The Chair brought the lengthy discussion to a close and having accepted Cllr Hughes' proposal it was **RESOLVED to**
- (i) **note the content of the Fire and Rescue Services in Wales project;**
 - (ii) **reaffirm the Authority's position on the report and the concerns already submitted to the Minister;**
 - (iii) **authorise the Chief Fire Officer to participate in the Programme Board based on the Authority's stance towards the report, provided that the other two CFOs in Wales will also be participating;**
 - (iv) **invite members of the Programme Board and author of the report to review the Authority's corporate and financial governance as an exemplar;**
 - (v) **circulate the report to all constituency and regional Assembly Members and Members of Parliament with the offer of a briefing meeting and inviting their support and representation for the position of the Authority.**

At this juncture, Cllr L W Davies left the meeting.

7 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2013-14

7.1 The Treasurer presented the report which gave members a review of the financial performance of the Authority for 2013-14. It was noted that the Audit Committee had discussed the same report at its meeting and members had no observations or could find any major risks in the report and recommended that it be approved by the Authority.

7.2 Members were given the opportunity to ask questions about the report and in response to a Member's question it was confirmed that chargeable incidents are referred to as special service calls which include loan of equipment and dealing with unsafe structures. Although chargeable, due to national guidance on the hourly rate that can be charged, the Service cannot recover its full costs for attending such incidents.

7.3 Cllr Lewis asked that in future reports for the budget information in appendix A to include previous year's figures as comparison. The Treasurer confirmed that this could be done.

7.4 **RESOLVED to**

(i) transfer of the underspend into Reserves and Provisions as follows:

Capital Reserve – to finance the capital programme to reduce future debt charges	£1,000,000
Retained Pensions Provision – to fully offset the liability now that negotiations have concluded	£336,358

(ii) transfers between Reserves and Provisions as follows:

Fees provision Wrexham – no longer required - transfer to Capital Reserve	£880,400
Earmarked Reserve 2013-14 – expenditure funded from revenue - transfer to General Reserve	£116,000

(iii) agree that appendix A of future reports will include budget figures for the previous year for comparison purposes.

8 COMBINED IMPROVEMENT AND RISK REDUCTION PLAN 2015-16

8.1 The Chief Fire Officer presented the report which summarised the work of the Improvement Planning Working Group and the recommendations on the Authority's draft Improvement Objectives for 2015-16 and beyond that had been presented to the Executive Panel.

- 8.2 The Improvement Plan Working Group received various presentations during its three meetings earlier in the year and focused on the funding gap predicted over the next 5 years and considered illustrations of the levels of cuts that would be needed to achieve the predicted £3m savings required. The CFO reiterated that the illustrations detailed in paragraph 9 of the report were merely examples and not proposals on the way forward.
- 8.3 Having considered all options and the CFO's advice, the Executive Panel at its meeting on 12 May had endorsed the proposal made by the Working Group that the current financial strategy for 2014-15 to 2016-17, which was to limit any increase in the annual revenue budget to a maximum amount equating to £1 per head of population, should be extended to 2019-20. This proposal now required the agreement of the Fire and Rescue Authority with the recognition that an extensive consultation would need to be held with the constituent authorities and the public in general. The Clerk advised that the six constituent authorities would be invited to consider the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service as part of the 'family services' and would recommend that approach in order for it to be transparent. He advised that an early presentation to the six councils would be beneficial to raise awareness prior to them starting to discuss next year's budget rounds.
- 8.4 **RESOLVED that**
- (i) **the draft Improvement Objective should be that, in order to maintain the current level of Fire and Rescue Service in North Wales, there should be an increase to the budget. However, the safeguard, that the level of annual increase should equate to no more than an additional £1 per year per head of population in North Wales, should continue and be extended from 2016-17 to 2019-20;**
- (ii) **this should be extensively and robustly consulted upon, in order to determine this 5-year strategy in time for the December Fire and Rescue Authority meeting.**
- 9 REVIEW OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS AND ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION POLICY
- 9.1 The Treasurer presented the report which sought approval of the updated Financial Regulations and Anti-Fraud and Corruption policy for the Authority, which was an action point from the annual governance self-assessment exercise for 2013-14.
- 9.2 The financial regulations provide the framework necessary to control the Authority's financial matters whilst also encouraging best value and promoting local accountability. Similarly the anti-fraud and corruption policy is the framework for good ethical governance within the Authority and sets out its commitment to the prevention and detection of fraud and corruption.
- 9.3 The Treasurer thanked Sandra Forrest and Claire Dingle for their work and it was noted that they had worked with officers from the other two fire and rescue authorities in Wales to produce regulations appropriate for the three authorities.
- 9.4 **RESOLVED to approve the updated Financial Regulations and Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy for use within the Authority.**

10 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY AND ACTUAL PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2013-14

10.1 The Treasurer introduced the report which is an annual requirement of the Authority's reporting procedures. The report detailed the treasury activity and the actual prudential indicators for 2013-2014 in accordance with the requirements of the Prudential Code.

10.2 The Authority had complied with all the relevant statutory and regulatory requirements which limit the levels of risk associated with its treasury management activities. Cllr Skelland as Chair of the Audit Committee confirmed that the Committee had received a detailed presentation on the report at its last meeting and recommended that the Authority approved the report. The Treasurer paid tribute to Sandra Forrest for all her work in monitoring the treasury management issues.

10.3 **RESOLVED to approve the actual 2013-2014 Prudential Indicators.**

At this juncture, Cllr A Evans left the meeting.

11 ANNUAL REPORT OF BAD DEBTS WRITTEN OFF

11.1 At the request of the Authority, the Treasurer submits an annual report by the 30 June following the end of the financial year listing all the debts written off and stating the reasons for write off.

11.2 **RESOLVED to note that between 1 April 2013 and 31 March 2014, the Service wrote off three bad debts totalling £848.18.**

12 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME: DISCRETIONARY POLICY

12.1 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the report which informed Members of the requirement for the Authority to produce a LGPS Discretionary Policy Statement. Members were also asked to approve the resolutions decided for each regulation within the LGPS Discretionary Policy Statement and to approve that on behalf of the FRA, decisions will be delegated on a day-to-day basis to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer.

12.2 The DCFO asked Members to note that the second paragraph under 1.5 of the appendix should be deleted as the member automatically has the right to use the 85 year rule from 60 onwards and so this does not require a policy.

12.3 **RESOLVED to approve each discretionary resolution within the LGPS Discretionary Policy Statement and to delegate day-to-day decisions to the Chief Fire Officer and Treasurer.**

13 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

13.1 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer presented the Annual Governance Statement to members for approval. It was noted that the Audit Committee had received a detailed presentation on each principle contained in the Statement and recommended that the Statement be approved by the Authority. It was noted that the actions plan contained in the Statement will be implemented in the coming months.

13.2 **RESOLVED to approve the content of the Annual Governance Statement for 2013-14.**

14 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL FOR WALES: ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

14.1 The Clerk presented the report which informed Members about further amendments to be made to the Authority's Remuneration Schedule following the publication of the Independent Remuneration Panel's Annual Report 2014/15.

14.2 The Clerk asked that Members delegate authority to him to deal with the minor issues in relation to paying independent members for preparation time and attendance at meetings.

14.3 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) **note the removal of the £120 rate to stay at a hotel in Cardiff and that it is now £95 anywhere outside of London;**
- (ii) **note that the FRA must now pay a fee to co-opted members for attendance at meetings;**
- (iii) **approve that the maximum number of days for which co-opted members may be paid in any one year remains at four full days per year;**
- (iv) **delegate authority to the Clerk and Monitoring Officer to resolve the issues set out below:**
 - **how much time is considered reasonable to be claimed for pre-meeting preparation (determination 34);**
 - **whether travelling time to and from the place of the meeting can be included in the claims for payments made by co-opted members (up to the maximum of the daily rate) (determination 35);**
 - **decide in advance of a meeting whether co-opted members can claim a full day or a half day fee and the fee will be paid on the basis of this determination even if the meeting finishes before four hours has elapsed;**
 - **including Determination 37 in the Schedule of Remuneration - Meetings eligible for the payment of fee include other committees and working groups (including task and finish groups), pre-meetings with officers, training and attendance at conferences or any other formal meeting to which co-opted members are requested to attend.**

15 MINUTES FOR INFORMATION

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

- Executive Panel meeting held on 12 May
- Audit Committee meeting held on 2 June.

15.2 **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.

16 INDUSTRIAL ACTION

16.1 The Chief Fire Officer provided an update on the industrial action.

16.2 In response to a Member's question about complacency in the general public and keeping them informed about strike action, the CFO informed Members about the social media sites being used to raise awareness and the prevention messages that are being shared on a regular basis and that these seemed to be well received by the public.

16.3 **RESOLVED to note the information provided and that Members will be kept informed of any further developments.**