

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

These are the minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 20th June 2005 at the Council Chamber, Bodlondeb, Conwy. Meeting commenced at 10.35am.

Present:

Councillor

T Roberts (Chairman)
M Williams (Vice-Chairman)

P C Evans JP
J Vaughan
G C Evans
S Frobisher
D Jones MBE
J A Smith
D Clayton
E F Evans
J B Attridge (substitute)
C Shone
M Griffith
E Morgan Jones
W T Owen
G O Williams
N S Colbourne
G M Craddock
E C George
P M Shone
W J Chorlton
W T Roberts

Representing

Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council

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

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); I R Miller (Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); C Hanks (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Support); P S Claydon (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery); P L Slee (Assistant Chief Officer, Corporate Services), S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); S Forrest (Treasurer's Department, Conwy County Borough Council) and Rh Evans (Member Liaison Officer).

PART I

1) Apologies

Councillor

S C Jones
R D Peacock
D Barratt
R G Hampson
J Ovens
J A Roberts

Representing

Conwy County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Ynys Môn County Council

2) Notice of Urgent Matters

The Chairman advised that no items had been submitted to either the Clerk or him for consideration.

3) Chairman's Announcements

- i. The Authority was informed of the death of Mr Derek Woolley, the retired former Deputy Chief Fire Officer of Clwyd County Fire Service. Condolences were extended to his family.
- ii. Members were informed by the Chairman of the death of Sir Kenneth Holland, the former Chief Inspector of Her Majesty's Fire Services' Inspectorate who was also an uncle to Councillor S C Jones. The Chairman referred to Sir Kenneth's distinguished career and offered the Authority's condolences to Councillor Jones and the family.
- iii. The Authority was informed by the Chairman that Councillor S C Jones had been taken ill whilst on holiday in France. At present she remained in hospital in France and the Authority conveyed its best wishes to her for a full and speedy recovery.
- iv. Congratulations were extended to Adam Frobisher, son of Councillor S Frobisher, who had recently been awarded the Welsh Young Volunteer of the Year Award for 2005. The award had been presented to him in recognition of the various volunteer activities with which he was involved, which included the Prestatyn Branch of the Young Firefighters' Association (YFA). The Frobisher family were also congratulated on being named Britain's Most Caring Family 2004 by "House Beautiful" magazine; this award was in recognition of their work within their community.
- v. Congratulations were extended to the following on being elected to various offices for the 2005/06 municipal year: Councillor J A Smith, Chairman of Denbighshire County Council; Councillor D Barratt,

- Vice-Chairman of Flintshire County Council; Councillor W T Owen, Mayor of Caernarfon; Councillor PC Evans JP, Deputy Mayor of Llandudno and Councillor S Frobisher, Deputy Mayor of Prestatyn.
- vi. Future committee meetings: the Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) Working Group would meet at 10:30 am on Monday 25th July 2005. Immediately following the Group's meeting, at approximately 12 noon, the Executive Panel would hold its next meeting. These meetings were to be held at the Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, St. Asaph. An invitation was extended to all Authority Members to visit the new Headquarters immediately following the Executive Panel meeting for a tour of the new building and of the site of the proposed Tri-Service Control Centre. On 22nd September 2005 the Welsh Assembly Government's Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration, Mrs Edwina Hart MBE AM, would be officially opening the new Headquarters. All members were to be invited to this event. An All-Wales Fire and Rescue Authorities Members' Seminar, at which the Minister had accepted an invitation to speak, had been arranged for 26th September 2005, the venue was yet to be confirmed but it would be held in the Mid-Wales area.
 - vii. The next meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority was scheduled to be held on Monday 19th September 2005 at Llangefni with subsequent meetings being held at Ruthin on Monday 19th December 2005, Caernarfon on Monday 20th March 2006 and Wrexham on Monday 19th June 2006.
 - viii. Best wishes were extended to Councillors M Griffith, J Vaughan and W E Jones and also to the Clerk, all of whom had celebrated special birthdays recently.

4) Minutes

The following minutes were submitted:

- i. Best Value Committee meeting held on 10th March 2005
- ii. Fire Authority meeting held on 21st March 2005

***Resolved:* - to approve both sets of minutes as a true and correct record of proceedings**

The following minutes were submitted for information purposes:

- iii. Extraordinary Executive Panel meeting held on 7th March 2005
- iv. Executive Panel meeting held on 25th April 2005

5) Matters Arising

The following matters arose from the minutes submitted:

Best Value Committee meeting 10th March 2005 – Councillor Margaret Griffith advised that she had tendered an apology for non-attendance but that this was not reflected in the minutes submitted.

Fire Authority Meeting 21st March 2005,

Page 3, Matters Arising, Chairman's visits to neighbouring and cross-border fire and rescue authorities: Members were advised that arrangements were now in place, following the appointment of a new Chief Fire Officer, for representatives from Shropshire Fire and Rescue Authority to visit North Wales Fire and Rescue Service. The visit was scheduled to take place on 30th September 2005. Arrangements were also in hand for a similar visit to be arranged for officials from North Wales to Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service.

Page 4 – final paragraph of the item on Matters Arising: Councillor W J Chorlton was of the opinion that the wording of this paragraph did not clearly reflect the issue he had attempted to raise at that particular meeting. While the accuracy of the minute should have been dealt with under the previous business item, the Chairman requested that the minute be amended for clarity purposes to read:

“Councillor W J Chorlton referred to a phone call that he had from the Clerk following a point he had raised at the Executive Panel on 7 March. His comments had not been intended to be disrespectful but had been so interpreted by the Chief Fire Officer, for which he had apologised. Councillor Chorlton was informed by the Clerk and Chairman that he could not raise an issue relating to the business of the Executive Panel's meeting on the 7th March 2005 at the current meeting as the minutes of that particular meeting had not been submitted for approval or for information.”

Pages 11 and 12, Fighting Fires at or under the sea: Councillor W J Chorlton enquired whether any further information had been received regarding the Authority's insurance cover for personnel who undertook these duties. The Chief Fire Officer was of the view that members had been satisfied with the advice they had been given on the matter at the last meeting and was not aware that further information had been requested. To his knowledge, the Authority provided the same level of insurance cover for personnel that undertook firefighting at sea as was provided by other authorities that delivered similar services. The level of insurance cover provided was comparable to the level provided to staff for undertaking other compulsory duties. In response to members' requests the Chairman asked officers to present a report on the matter to the Authority's next meeting in September. It was:

Resolved: - that a report be submitted to the Fire and Rescue Authority's meeting in September 2005 detailing the level of insurance cover provided by North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority to its personnel that undertook firefighting duties at or under the sea in comparison to the insurance cover provided by other fire and rescue authorities to their personnel for undertaking similar duties.

Councillor D Clayton enquired whether the Authority had received any responses from the Assembly Government to the representations it had made for orders required under the "Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004" to be expedited. The Clerk confirmed that the Assembly Government had acknowledged receipt of the Authority's representations but, to date, no new legislation had been introduced. The Chairman informed members that he had raised the issue with the Minister and that she was sympathetic towards the Authority's sentiments on the delay in bringing forward legislation.

6) Chairman's Report

The Chairman introduced his report (distributed at the meeting) which provided members with a brief update on the meetings and events attended by him, in his capacity as Chairman, since the Fire and Rescue Authority's last meeting on 21st March 2005. He then proceeded to detail the events and the activities, listed in his report and answered members' questions on various aspects of the information presented. In reply to a question from Councillor P C Evans on the reason why members had not been notified of the official opening ceremonies for the Conwy and Flintshire County Safety Offices, the Chairman advised that a decision had been taken not to invite members to the ceremonies due to the limited number of places available at both sites. Councillor Evans accepted that it may not have been practical to invite members to the ceremonies but he was of the view that members should have been informed that they were being held. Councillor W J Chorlton enquired about an event that Holyhead Fire Station seemed to be involved with in relation to National Child Safety Week, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Claydon advised that National Child Safety Week was an Office of Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) initiative with which local Community Fire Safety (CFS) teams were involved. Some members were concerned that a number of other events seemed to have been held of which they had not received notification. Other members were concerned that, although they had served on the Authority for at least 12 months, they still had not received an invitation to visit their local fire station and were not given the opportunity to interact with their local stations. The Chairman requested that the policy for informing local members about various events was reviewed to ensure that members were kept informed about all events being held in their areas at which the Service would have a presence. Members were informed by the Chairman that the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration had been greatly impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication shown by personnel, at both County Safety Offices, towards the overall aim of improving community safety. He requested that his gratitude to all personnel associated with both opening ceremonies, for promoting such a positive image of the Service and the Authority in North Wales, be recorded in the minutes.

Councillor N S Colbourne thanked Officers for arranging the visit to Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service's International Training Centre at Chorley. He was of the view that the visit had been a worthwhile experience for all who attended.

In relation to a meeting of the North Wales Programme Board, the committee that was overseeing the proposal to co-locate the control rooms for the three emergency services in North Wales, the Chairman advised that a business case was in the process of being compiled. A comprehensive report, which would include the business case, would be submitted to the Authority's September meeting for members' consideration.

In response to a question from Councillor C Shone the Chairman informed members that at the Wales Fire Services' Forum meeting, on 18th May 2005, North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's proposal to expand the Forum's membership had been rejected. For information purposes the Chairman then read out the relevant extract from the minutes of the Forum's meeting. The Chairman stated that he was now of the opinion that the most appropriate way to progress the matter would be to consider the proposals presented by the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) in its report which was due to be discussed later on the current meeting's agenda. All fire and rescue authorities in Wales would be discussing these proposals in due course. It was:

Resolved: -

- i. to note the information contained in the report;***
- ii. that the Authority's policy on informing members of events at which there would be a Service presence be revisited in order to ensure that local members are routinely informed of all significant events within their county area at which there would be either Service participation or presence;***
and
- iii. that a comprehensive report on the proposed co-located emergency services' control room for North Wales, including the business case, be submitted to the Authority's September meeting for consideration***

7) Use of Resources – Key Messages from Our Review

The Chairman welcomed Mr David Jones, Audit Manager, and Mr Mark Roberts, Principal Auditor, from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) to the meeting to present the findings of the "Review of Use of Resources" which they had recently undertaken. Mr Jones advised members that the review formed part of the work the WAO was expected to undertake under the Code of Audit Practice. By way of a presentation Mr Roberts reminded the Authority of the areas which had been included in the 2004/05 Audit Plan and of the areas which were relevant to the agenda the Authority was currently pursuing: the modernisation agenda, the National Framework for the Fire and Rescue Services in Wales and the Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI). He proceeded to explain that the objectives of the audit had been the identification of the progress made in developing a response to the key risk areas identified in the audit planning process, areas of good practice, barriers to change and any further work required. The approach taken for conducting the review had been the examination of documentation and discussions with key officers.

The three key messages that had come out of the review, were: the positive elements, common themes and areas which required further action. Mr Roberts then expanded on the three key messages:

Positive Elements: the Authority had clear corporate aims and objectives; it had already introduced a new policy development framework; it was showing evidence of effective partnership working; strategies were in the process of being developed; a number of key risk areas had been identified and the management re-structuring had been completed with the new Management Team now in place.

Common Themes: these were determined by both national and local requirements and included strategy development; risk management; partnership and collaboration, such as the co-located Control Room project; the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services in Wales and the WPI. Mr Roberts stressed the importance of strategy development as it provided a link between the corporate objectives and the action plans and would provide the Authority with a clear focus. Strategy development was also a key element of the WPI, which was due to be introduced for fire and rescue authorities from April 2006. Currently the Authority had a draft Risk Management Strategy in place. Effective Risk Management was a key element of both the National Framework and the WPI and would be a valuable tool to assist in the delivery of continuous improvement and high quality services. It would also assist in increasing the focus on what needed to be done in order to achieve the set objectives.

The Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) had identified a number of Human Resources related risks and arrangements. As a result and in attempt to address these issues a Human Resources strategy was under development. Also under development was an Asset Management Plan which would assist in the assessment of risks related to the holding of assets. The Authority had long recognised the benefits of Partnership Working, another key element of both the National Framework and the WPI. It had also recognised the importance of drawing up a strategy document on Partnership Working and that partnerships could also assist in addressing risks and contribute to the achievement of the Authority's strategic objectives in both an economic and efficient manner. The Service had long standing collaborative relationships with the other fire and rescue services in Wales. In addition, it had a number of local partnerships in place and arrangements for further partnership working opportunities were being explored.

Areas which required further action: Mr David Jones then concluded the presentation by summarising the key findings and informed members that the need from now on would be to complete the development of Strategy Documents, to continue to develop the Risk Identification process and to develop Action Plans to address the issues identified.

In reply to various questions Mr Jones and Mr Roberts emphasised that none of the issues should be looked at in isolation, the Authority needed to consider the wider picture as all issues were inter-related. Human Resources was an example of a particularly difficult area on which to develop a strategy, as the strategy would need to reconcile within it both local and national issues. Members were advised that the WAO was confident that the Risk Management Strategy, which would be given priority as it encompassed most areas, would be available for submission to the Authority's September meeting for consideration.

The Chairman thanked Mr Jones and Mr Roberts for attending, presenting their findings and for answering members' questions. Members:

Resolved: - to note the information presented to them

8) Utilisation of the 2004/05 Budget Underspend

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) which updated members on the Authority's total underspend figure for the 2004/05 financial year. He thanked the Assistant Chief Officer (Corporate Services), Sandra Forrest and Claire Davies, Finance Manager, for their assistance in compiling the report. Members were reminded by the Treasurer that he had requested the Authority, at its last meeting, to defer a decision on how to allocate the balance of the underspend pending the resolution of an issue which had the potential to impact on the Authority's 2005/06 Capital Programme. Following further investigations that issue had been brought to a satisfactory conclusion without any effect on the Capital Programme. Prior to detailing all the points listed in his report the Treasurer informed members that the final overall underspend figure was higher than previously reported. This was in the main attributable to a lower number of operational incidents occurring during the final part of the financial year than had originally been anticipated. The Treasurer referred in detail to each area of the underspend that showed a material difference to the figures previously reported to the Authority and answered members' questions accordingly.

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Authority that a review of the operation of the Commercial Fire Safety Training Unit was currently underway. It was envisaged that the results of the review would be available for submission to the Authority at its next meeting in September, but Officers were of the view that it would be prudent to write off the Unit's debt at the present time whilst funds were available. The fact that the review was being conducted and that the Unit was currently running at a loss did not necessarily mean that the recommendation would be to disband it.

Councillor W J Chorlton advised the Authority that his own constituent authority's viewpoint, that the balance outstanding should be returned to the constituent authorities, had not changed since the last meeting. The Treasurer responded stating that each individual authority was entitled to its own opinion but the

difficulty with setting a budget for an emergency service was the exact nature of the service provided and the fact that the only information to hand upon which to base the anticipated operational costs was the number and types of incidents which had occurred in previous years. During the last financial year the number of incidents had not reached the predicted levels. The Chief Fire Officer agreed with the Treasurer's view. The end of year statistics had shown that there had been a 27% reduction in the number of fires recorded during 2004/05. From a safety aspect these figures were very encouraging but they also had the effect on the overall budget of increasing the amount of the underspend: fewer number of incidents meant that less had been spent on retained firefighters' wages and on transport costs. A number of members concurred with the Treasurer and the Chief Fire Officer's views that the underspend presented an ideal opportunity for the Authority to set the money aside as provisions for a number of future projects and initiatives such as the Control Project. As the Authority's business was to provide a public service that was high risk and for which it was extremely difficult to predict the levels that would be required, it may not find itself in such a fortunate position in the future. On being put to the vote all but one of the members present voted in favour of the recommendations as listed in the report, the other member abstained. It was:

Resolved: - that -

- i. the accumulated deficit to 31 March 2005 of £39,986 for the Commercial Fire Safety Unit be written off within 2004/05's accounts;***
- ii. a £190,000 Provision for Uniforms be created from the 2004/05 underspend;***
- iii. £100,000 of the underspend be utilised to create a Control Project Provision; and***
- iv. the remaining underspend of £373,186 be used to fund capital expenditure for 2004/05***

Councillor P C Evans left the meeting at this juncture.

9) Statement of Accounts

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) and the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2005. He explained that the Statement of Accounts was being presented to members for their approval as per the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 1996. This would be the final year that the 1996 Regulations would apply, all Statements relating to the period from 1st April 2005 would be subject to the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2005. The accounts had been submitted to the District Auditor who would, in due course, issue his opinion. If the Auditor raised any significant issues they would be reported back to the Authority otherwise, once the Auditor had issued his report, a copy of the final Statement of Accounts would be sent to all members. The Treasurer invited members' questions on the Accounts and

advised that the Welsh language version of the report and Statement were now available for distribution. Members:

Resolved: - to approve that Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31st March 2005

10) Summary of Internal Audit Activity for 2004/05 and the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2005/06

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) summarising the Internal Audit work for 2004/05 and the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2005/06. Before detailing the contents of his report the Treasurer explained that the Internal Auditor had provided 3 additional days of internal audit activity than had been factored in to the original plan and budget.

Councillor W J Chorlton advised members that he had information from what he stated to be a reliable source that the Service had spent £200,000 on a new telephony system that had now been declared defunct. He added that the same source had informed him that there was a large number of computers stored in a garage on Fire and Rescue Service premises and not being used.

The Chief Fire Officer replied that there had been problems with the IP Telephony System installed in parts of the Service's area but that it was not defunct. He thought that the reference to a large number of computers in storage needed further clarification but may refer to the ongoing work to develop the use of tablet style computers. Members requested that a report be submitted to the Executive Panel's meeting on 25th July 2005.

Resolved: -

- i. to note the summary of Internal Audit work for 2004/05 and approve the Draft Internal Audit Plan for 2005/06; and***
- ii) that a report is submitted to the Executive Panel meeting on 25th July dealing with the issues raised by Councillor Chorlton.***

11) Treasury Management

The Treasurer introduced his annual treasury report (previously circulated). He explained that the presentation of the report, which covered the treasury activity for 2004/05, was a requirement under the Authority's reporting procedures. Members were informed that, as part of the budget setting process and in order to comply with the requirements of the Prudential Code, the Authority had to set a number of indicators. It was encouraging to report that the Authority had performed slightly better on its borrowing strategy than had originally been anticipated and that it had operated within the set boundaries. Members:

Resolved: - to note the report on the Treasury Management activities for 2004/05

12) Amendment to the Scheme of Delegations to the Chief Fire Officer

The Clerk introduced his report (previously circulated) seeking the Authority to agree, as a consequence of the new procedures for discipline, grievance and capability already adopted by the Authority, on an amendment to the Scheme of Delegations to the Chief Fire Officer. Members were reminded by the Clerk that the Authority had resolved, at its meeting on 21st March 2005, to amend the Executive Panel's Terms of Reference to reflect the changes in its responsibilities following the introduction of new legislation and the adoption of the new Procedures. Therefore, for consistency purposes, the wording of the exception from the delegation relating to personnel matters in the Authority's Scheme of Delegations to the Chief Fire Officer required amending to reflect the new procedures now being operated. It was:

Resolved: - that the relevant exception from the delegation in respect of personnel matters be amended to read: "acting as appeals panel under the discipline, grievance and capability procedures where that role is conferred on the fire authority"

13) The relationship between the WLGA and the Fire and Rescue Services in Wales

The Chief Fire Officer introduced his report (previously circulated) which sought members' views on the future relationship between the Fire and Rescue Authority and the WLGA. He explained that a discussion paper, prepared by Mr Steve Thomas the Director of the WLGA, had been attached to the report for members' consideration. The discussion paper would, in due course, be discussed by all Welsh fire and rescue authorities. At the Chairman's request members:

Resolved: - to defer discussion on the report on the relationship between the WLGA and the Fire and Rescue Services in Wales and delegated that the Executive Panel should receive and debate the report and discussion paper on the Authority's behalf at its meeting on 25th July 2005

14) Future Arrangements for Handling Best Value

The Clerk introduced his report (circulated previously) which requested the Authority to consider a recommendation from the Best Value Committee, endorsed by the Executive Panel, that the responsibilities for the handling of Best Value issues should in future be undertaken by the Executive Panel. The Clerk explained that the background information relating to the submitted recommendation was detailed in the report and that, if the Authority approved the transfer of powers, consequential amendments to the Executive Panel's Terms of Reference would also require approval. Members:

Resolved: -

- i. that the Best Value Committee should be wound up and its responsibilities transferred to the Executive Panel; and***
- ii. that the Panel's Terms of Reference should be amended by adding as paragraph 2.4:***

"In addition the Panel shall exercise the authority's functions under sections 3 to 6 of the Local Government Act 1999 including:

- (i) overseeing and monitoring the authority's compliance with the best value requirements of the 1999 Act;***
- (ii) overseeing and approving best value reviews;***
- (iii) overseeing and approving the content of the best value performance plan;***
- (iv) monitoring performance against best value performance indicators and local performance indicators."***

15) Complaints and Letters of Appreciation

The Chief Fire Officer introduced his report (previously circulated) with a view to informing and updating members on the number of complaints and letters of appreciation received from the public. He explained that the report had been written in a way which protected the anonymity of all parties involved. Members were advised by the Chairman that, at his request, Officers had included more information in this year's report on the letters of appreciation received. It was:

Resolved: - ***to note the number of complaints and letters of appreciation received.***

Councillor W J Chorlton left the meeting at this juncture.

16) "Informative"

The Chief Fire Officer presented the current issue of the 'Informative' magazine to members. Bethan Davies, the Service's Press and Public Relations Officer was thanked by the Chairman for her work in producing an extremely professional newsletter. Councillor E C George requested that details of the Community Fire Safety staff based in the county safety offices be circulated to all the local Fire and Rescue Authority members. The Authority:

Resolved: - ***to accept the publication and that details of fire safety staff based in the county safety offices be circulated to the local Fire and Rescue Authority members.***

17) Urgent Matters

No items had been submitted for consideration.

PART II

No business.

The meeting concluded at 12.25pm.

The above minutes, pending any inclusions shown, are approved as a true and correct record of proceedings.

Signed: T Roberts

Dated: 19 September, 2005