

**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

Minutes of the Executive Panel meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> October 2006 at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, St. Asaph. Meeting commenced at 11.30am.

**Present:**

**Councillor**

T Roberts (Chairman)  
E C George (Vice-Chairman)

S C Jones  
J M Vaughan  
S Frobisher  
W T Owen  
G M Craddock  
M Williams  
W J Chorlton  
J A Roberts

**Representing**

Gwynedd Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council

Conwy County Borough Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Gwynedd 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 Enness (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); C Hanks (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Support); D Docx (Assistant Chief Officer, Finance and Procurement); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); W A Murphy (Senior Operations Manager); K Hughes (Service Development Manager); L Roberts (Fire Control Manager); S. Roberts (Head of Facilities Management Department); H Angel (Chief Officer's Advisory Team Support Officer); Rh Williams (Corporate Communications Officer) and Rh Evans (Member Liaison Officer).

**PART I**

**1) Apologies**

**Councillor**

J A Smith  
D Barratt  
E F Evans  
E Morgan Jones

**Representing**

Denbighshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Gwynedd Council

P S Claydon

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery)

## 2) Notice of Urgent Matters

Members were informed by the Chairman that no items had been submitted to him or the Clerk for consideration.

The Chairman apologised to the Panel for the unavailability of Welsh language versions of some reports. This was because the Service's Translator had recently left to pursue an academic career and for a short period of time the Service would be without a translator until the newly appointed translator could take up post.

## 3) Risk Reduction Plan 2007/08

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) introduced her report (previously circulated) informing members of the responses received to the consultation on the Authority's draft Risk Reduction Plan (RRP) 2007/08. She explained that the report asked the Panel to formulate a recommendation in relation to the Plan's adoption for submission to the Authority at its next meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2006, and to agree the wording of the Authority's proposed response to the issues raised. Attachment 1 of the report listed and categorised all the responses received and set out the proposed wording of the Authority's reply to the comments received from the 16 respondents.

At the RRP Working Group meeting, which preceded the Executive Panel meeting, the Service's Corporate Planning Manager had given members a detailed breakdown of the responses received and an explanation of the proposed replies on the Authority's behalf. The Working Group had concluded that the Executive Panel should recommend to the Authority that the RRP for 2007/08 be adopted. During the discussion the issue of installing sprinklers in all new and refurbished school building projects was raised. Members were of the view that the Authority should pursue this issue over the coming months and in particular lobby all AMs and prospective Assembly candidates ahead of next year's Assembly elections. Councillor W J Chorlton proposed that the Authority should write to all mainstream political parties requesting that they include a policy on the compulsory installation of sprinkler systems in all new and refurbished school building projects in their election manifestos. This proposal was seconded and the Panel:

### **Resolved: -**

- i. to note the responses received to the consultation on the RRP 2007/08;*
- ii. to recommend to the full Fire Authority at its next meeting that the RRP 2007/08 be adopted as drafted, subject to only minor editorial corrections;*
- iii. that the proposed wording of the Authority's response to written comments submitted on the draft RRP 2007/08 be as presented in Attachment 1; and*

- iv. that a letter be sent to all mainstream political parties requesting that they include in their manifestos for next year's National Assembly election a policy undertaking to make it compulsory to install sprinkler systems in all new build and refurbished school projects.*

#### **4) The Draft Improvement Plan for 2006/07 for approval**

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) introduced her report (previously circulated) informing members of interim arrangements for the production of Improvement Plans by fire and rescue authorities in Wales in 2006/07. She explained that whilst the draft Improvement Plan listed and detailed the improvement priorities for 2006/07 it also summarised the Authority's attainment against the set targets during 2005/06 and listed areas where it would seek to secure further improvements in 2007/08.

The Service's Corporate Planning Manager then briefed members on the legislative background that had led to the situation arising which required the Authority, at short notice, to publish and approve an Improvement Plan for 2006/07 by 31<sup>st</sup> October. Although Improvement Plans were required to be approved by the full Authority, the draft Plan was being submitted to the Panel for consideration with the view that it could formulate a recommendation for the Authority in relation to its approval. Members agreed with the Clerk's view that the Authority should make representations to the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) seeking it to publish without further delay the Guidance on the Wales Programme for Improvement for Fire and Rescue Authorities (WPI-FRA), as its publication would assist authorities with the preparation of future RRP's.

In reply to a question from Councillor W J Chorlton the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that the statistics on the number of black and minority ethnic personnel had been collated and recorded as per legislative requirements. It was:

#### **Resolved: - to**

- i. note the requirement to publish an Improvement Plan for 2006/07 before 31<sup>st</sup> October 2006;*
- ii. approve the draft Improvement Plan 2006/07 for presentation to the full Fire and Rescue Authority at its next meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2006; and*
- iii. to make representations to the Welsh Assembly Government seeking it to expedite the publication of the Guidance on the Wales Programme for Improvement for Fire and Rescue Authorities (WPI-FRA).*

#### **5) Complaints Procedure – Stage 3**

The Clerk introduced his report (previously circulated) which asked the Panel to agree handling arrangements for stage 3 of the complaints procedure and to recommend to the Fire Authority that it adopts these arrangements for the future.

Members were advised by the Clerk that the Authority, on its establishment in 1996, had adopted a complaints procedure which set out three stages to the complaints process, the final stage being the option of requesting that the complaint is brought to the attention of the Fire Authority. The Clerk informed the Panel that it was pleasing that no complaint had reached the final stage until now, but recently a complaint had been received that specifically requested that it was to be referred to the Authority. He proceeded to explain that as the Authority had no written procedure on how to handle and hear a complaint in the third stage the paper before them recommended a procedure which could be adopted for dealing with the complaint in hand and which could also be recommended for adoption as a procedure for dealing with any such complaints in the future. The Clerk advised members that he had considered whether it would be appropriate for both sides to question each other at the hearing, but had concluded that this would be inappropriate at this stage. In replying to members' questions the Clerk advised that the third stage of the complaints procedure was the final stage of the internal complaints procedure, but complainants could pursue their complaints via the channels listed in paragraph 2 of his report. He also advised that, as far as he was aware, none of the Panel members had been in any way involved with the complaint that required the Authority's attention and would therefore not be debarred from serving on the proposed sub-committee. It was:

**Resolved:** -

- i. that a sub-committee of three members, namely Councillors E C George, W J Chorlton and S Frobisher, be appointed to hear a third stage complaint;*
- ii. that the format for the hearing be as set out in paragraph 7 of the report; and*
- iii. to recommend to the Fire Authority that it formally adopts these arrangements for hearing any stage 3 complaint in future.*

**6) Urgent Matters**

None.

**7) Date(s) of future meetings**

Following a discussion members:

**Resolved:** - *that the date for the next Executive Panel meeting be set at the Fire and Rescue Authority's meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2006.*

The Chairman informed members that it was recommended that the remaining items of business on the meeting's agenda be discussed without the public or Press present. It was:

***Resolved:*** - pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because it was likely that there would be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 8, 9 and 10 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

## **PART II**

### **8) "Fire 1<sup>st</sup>" – Rhyl Community Fire Station Project**

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) introduced his report (previously circulated) informing members of the financial aspects of the Rhyl Fire First Remodelling Project. He informed the Panel that the report contained the relevant background information to this innovative project, the proposed financial and construction timescale, and the information on grants and contributions which had been verbally guaranteed to the Authority towards the cost of the scheme. Members were also informed of other possible funding sources which were currently under exploration. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Hanks informed members that the appendices to the report gave a comprehensive breakdown of the costs and the options for funding the project. The Treasurer then detailed the financial aspects of the project and the risks to the Authority associated with the funding options presented to them. He emphasised that despite correspondence, and a number of conversations, between the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) and civil servants in relation to the verbal assurances given by WAG that the promised funding would be forthcoming, no written confirmation of the funding amounts had yet been received. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Hanks informed Panel members that during a telephone conversation with a WAG civil servant at the end of the previous week he had been advised that the Minister had received answers to all her questions, but that no indication could be given of when she was expected to announce a formal decision on the granting of funding.

In reply to members' questions Assistant Chief Fire Officer Hanks gave details of organisations and agencies which had confirmed their interest in using the facilities that would be available at the new station. He also confirmed that the fire station site was not within a Communities First area. Mr Stephen Roberts, Head of the Facilities Management Department, assured the Panel that the figures quoted in the report were inflation proofed. He also undertook to provide members with the cost figures for a basic station refurbishment. The Clerk reminded members that developing the concept of community fire stations had been included in the Authority's original Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) and in its RRP. The Fire and Rescue National Framework for Wales also advocated that fire stations required to be more accessible and available for community and youth organisations' use.

Some members were of the view that the fact that over 1000 people had attended the open day, when the plans for the station had been put on public display, proved that the project had been embraced by the local community.

The feedback from those that attended had been generally extremely positive. Other members were of the view that the Authority needed to exercise an element of caution in order to safeguard its overall financial position and should therefore await written confirmation of the amount of grant funding both the WAG's Department of Social Justice and Regeneration and the Department for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks (which had taken over the functions of the Welsh Development Agency) were willing to guarantee towards the cost of the project. They also felt that further work was required in order to ensure that the income generated from organisations wishing to use the facilities would be sufficient to secure the project's economic viability and sustainability. Members were advised by officers that any delay in approving to proceed with the project would impact on the budget setting process for the next financial year and on the building timetable. The Treasurer suggested to members that it may be helpful if the Chairman wrote to the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration requesting that she confirms in writing the decision in relation to the grant funding for the project ahead of the Fire and Rescue Authority's meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2006. Following an in-depth discussion it was proposed and seconded that the report's recommendations be approved. An amendment to this recommendation was proposed and seconded. The amendment was put to the vote first and was carried by a majority. It was:

**Resolved:** -

- i to agree in principle to proceed with the Rhyl "Fire First" project pending the receipt of written assurances from the WAG that grant funding, including the amounts awarded, would be provided towards the cost of the project;*
- ii that the Chairman writes to the WAG's Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration requesting that the written assurances regarding the funding be received prior to the Authority's next meeting on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2006; and*
- iii alternatively, if financial aid is not awarded, that the matter be referred back to the Executive Panel/Fire Authority for determination of how to proceed with the project.*

12.25pm: The Chairman left the meeting at this point and the Vice-Chairman took the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

## **9) Senior Salary Review**

Prior to commencement of this item of business members enquired whether it was appropriate for the Service's Principal Officers, whose pay would be the subject of the review, to be present during the discussion. The Clerk advised that the sole purpose of the report presented to the Panel was to agree on a method by which to conduct the review: no remuneration amounts would be discussed. Members were of the view that it would be more appropriate and transparent if the Service's Principal Officers withdrew from the meeting room. It was:

***Resolved: - that the Service's Principal Officers be requested to withdraw from the meeting room for the duration of this item of business.***

The Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) and the Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) withdrew from the meeting room for the remainder of the meeting.

The Clerk introduced his report (previously circulated) which asked the Panel to agree arrangements for a review of salaries for the Chief Fire Officer and other senior officers. He explained that the report before them contained background information and advice on how to proceed with a review of this type. Attached to the report in the form of an appendix was the proposed terms of reference for the review, detailing its scope, timetable, context, methodology and decision making process. Members were advised by the Clerk and Treasurer that engaging external consultants was recommended as they had the resources to undertake the fundamental review which the Authority had, last time a senior salary review had taken place in 2004, resolved to undertake in 2006. Also contained as an appendix to the report were details of the experience, costs and methodology provided by three consultancy companies.

Members' questions on the process and the "Gold Book" rules were answered by the Clerk and Treasurer. Until the review had been completed there would be no way of assessing the potential financial implications for the Authority of salary costs arising from the review. Panel members were assured that the Authority would not be bound to slavishly follow the consultants' recommendations. The outcome of the review would be left to the sub-committee's judgement following consideration of the consultants' findings. The Panel:

***Resolved: - to***

- i. appoint a special committee to undertake a review of salaries of senior officers, to consist of the chair and vice-chair and one member from each of the constituent authorities;*
- ii. that in addition to the chair and vice-chair that Councillors J Vaughan, S Frobisher, W T Owen, G M Craddock, J A Roberts and a representative from Flintshire serve on the special committee;*
- iii. that the terms of reference for the review be as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report; and*
- iv. that the Reward Partnership be appointed as the consultants to support the review.*

Meeting concluded at 12.45pm.

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

**Signed:** T Roberts

**Dated:** 12 December, 2006