

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 18th December 2006 at Siambr Dafydd Orwig, Caernarfon. Meeting commenced at 10.30am.

Present:

Councillor

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

S C Jones
W E Jones
R D Peacock
G C Evans
J A Smith
G Williams
E F Evans
J Ovens
C Shone
M Griffith
E Morgan Jones
W T Owen
G O Williams
W J Chorlton
W T Roberts

Representing

Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council

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

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); I K Hearle (Acting 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); P S Claydon (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery); D Docx (Assistant Chief Officer, Finance and Procurement); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); W A Murphy (Senior Operations Manager); D G Roberts (Retained Duty System Project Manager); K Hughes (Senior Fire Safety Manager); G Brandrick (Service Development Manager); S Forrest (Treasurer's Department, Conwy County Borough Council); A Edwards (Denbighshire County Safety Manager); S Roberts (Head of Facilities Management Department) and Rh Evans (Member Liaison Officer).

PART I

1) Apologies

Councillor

P C Evans JP
J M Vaughan
S Frobisher
D Barratt
R G Hampson
N S Colbourne
P M Shone
M Williams
J A Roberts

Representing

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

I R Miller

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

2) Notice of Urgent Matters

The Chairman advised that in response to a request from officers he had permitted the order of business to be varied. The Treasurer's reports would be discussed immediately following the Chairman's Report to enable the Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) to leave the meeting to travel to East Sussex to represent the Authority at the funeral of Mr Brian Wembridge, one of two East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service personnel killed at the fireworks factory explosion in Ringmer earlier in the month.

Members were informed by the Chairman that in response to requests he had permitted discussion to take place on two items of correspondence under 'Urgent Matters': a letter received from Barmouth Town Council and a letter sent by the Chief Fire Officer to all personnel. Both items would be discussed under agenda item number 17.

3) Announcements

Prior to the Chairman's announcements members and officers observed a minute's silence in memory of the two personnel members from East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service who lost their lives in the Ringmer explosion.

- i. Councillor Glyn Williams, Denbighshire County Council's new representative on the Authority, was welcomed to his first meeting.
- ii. Councillor Sue Jones was welcomed to the meeting following her recent stay in hospital.
- iii. Tribute was paid to Mr D Bryan Evans, Morfa Nefyn who passed away at the end of the summer. Mr Evans had been one of Gwynedd Council's representatives on the Authority from its

formation in 1996 until 2004 and had been instrumental in ensuring that the Authority conducted its business through the medium of Welsh as well as English.

- iv. Members were advised that special business cards containing useful fire safety messages and numbers had been produced for them to hand out to their constituents.
- v. Dates of future committee meetings: members were advised that the next meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority was scheduled for Monday 19th March 2007 and would be held at County Hall, Ruthin at 10.30am. The Executive Panel would meet on Wednesday 24th January 2007 with the Risk Reduction Planning (RRP) Working Group meeting on Tuesday 30th January 2007, both meetings would commence at 10am and would be held at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, St. Asaph. Members were reminded that all Executive Panel members were also members of the RRP Working Group and that all Authority members had the right to attend any Authority committee meeting.
- vi. Members were reminded that the Combined Emergency Services' Carol Service would be held that evening at Bangor Cathedral.
- vii. Members were also reminded of the need to submit VAT receipts that either pre-dated, or were dated on, journey dates for which claims were submitted for mileage expenses.

In response to the last item a number of members voiced their concern that some individuals were losing out on mileage reimbursement as they were unable to provide sufficient receipts to cover their travelling costs to each body on which they served. The Treasurer explained that the matter of being able to claim back VAT in these circumstances was governed by national legislation in conformity with the EU and this legislation would be unlikely to be changed. However, in his opinion, nobody should 'lose' mileage to which they were entitled to claim. The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) informed members that she had looked into the issue and it appeared that the Authority was reclaiming approximately £10k's worth of VAT on mileage allowances paid. She was of the opinion that the Authority could be spending approximately the same amount in administering the verification process for mileage expenses claims as it was recouping in returnable VAT. Members:

Resolved: -

- i. that a letter be sent to HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) to advise of the concerns and difficulties members encounter if they serve on other organisations and/or have private business where VAT receipts are also required and to seek HMRC views as to how these difficulties could be overcome; and*
- ii. that a report be prepared and submitted to a future meeting of the Executive Panel detailing the costs of administering the scheme of verifying VAT fuel receipts in connection with members and officers' travel claims in*

comparison to the financial benefits realised by the Authority in reclaiming the VAT element of mileage expenses claims.

4) Minutes

The following minutes were submitted:

- i. Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 23rd October 2006

Resolved: - *to approve the minutes as a true and correct record of proceedings.*

The following minutes were submitted for information purposes:

- ii. Executive Panel meeting 21st September 2006
- iii. Standards Committee meeting 2nd October 2006
- iv. Executive Panel meeting 9th October 2006

5) Matters Arising

The following matters arose from the minutes submitted:

Fire and Rescue Authority meeting, 23rd October 2006:

Page 3, Item 5 – Matters Arising “Co-responding”: members were informed by the Chief Fire Officer that the High Court had found in favour of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in the case it had brought against Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Authorities in relation to Co-responding and firefighters’ contractual arrangements under the 2003 Pay and Conditions of Service Agreement. Since the announcement of the judgement the authorities concerned had lodged an appeal. Pending the outcome of the appeal hearing co-responding trials, both locally and nationally, had been put on hold. The Chairman advised members that once the appeal had been heard and the judgement was known the issues surrounding co-responding trials would be reported back to the Authority. Members were informed that the Executive Panel at its meeting the previous week had agreed that the Authority, if approached, would contribute an amount not exceeding £2,000 towards the appeal costs.

Page 4, Item 7 – “Risk Reduction Plan 2007/08”: members were informed by the Chairman that a letter received from Barmouth Town Council in connection with the proposals endorsed by the Authority under its Risk Reduction Plan (RRP) for 2007/08 would be dealt with under business item number 17.

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 and in his absence the Vice-Chairman, since the Fire and

Rescue Authority's last meeting on 23rd October 2006. Members were advised that changes to uniformed personnel's long service payments had been agreed at the meeting of the National Joint Council for Local Authorities' Fire Brigades (NJC) which he had attended the previous Friday. Further details of these changes would be communicated to authorities and personnel in due course. It was:

Resolved: - to note the information contained in the report.

7) Pension contingencies issues and the constituent authorities

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) which, in accordance with members' request at the Authority's previous meeting, detailed the financial amounts that could be returned from the Pension Provision to the constituent authorities. He explained that the new financing arrangements for the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, due to come into effect in April 2007, made it unnecessary for the Authority to hold such a large Pension Provision. At the Authority's previous meeting some members had registered their concern that central government could, in the light of the new funding arrangements, demand that the Pension Provision money be paid to the Assembly. The Treasurer once again reassured members that the Assembly could not take such action as the Pension Provision money belonged to the constituent authorities. He proceeded to explain that his advice would be for the Authority to retain a total of £792k for the purposes detailed in his report and return the balance of £1m to the constituent authorities pro rata based on the 2004 mid-year population estimates. The chief finance officers of the relevant authorities had been informed of the propositions and of the proposed repayable amounts to each authority, as detailed in paragraph 6 of the report. To date no objections had been received to the proposals. It would not be possible for the Authority to include a caveat, stipulating that the Fire and Rescue Authority could at any time request part or all of the returned amounts to be paid back to the Authority to alleviate pension pressures, when returning the monies to the constituent authorities. Therefore the Treasurer informed members that he would be suggesting to the constituent authorities that they only use part of the returned amount to alleviate the impact of the reduction in the Revenue Support Grant (RSG), as the Fire and Rescue Authority may at some future date be requesting supplementary financial assistance from them. Members:

Resolved: - that

- i. £665k of the Pension Provision be retained for future pension liabilities;***
- ii. £127k of the Pension Provision be used to fund the set up costs of the Tri-Control if it is agreed that the scheme will go ahead; and***
- iii. £1m of the Pension Provision is repaid to the constituent authorities as per the breakdown detailed in paragraph 6 the report.***

8) Draft Budget for 2007/08 and forecast for 2008/09 and 2009/10

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) presenting members with the Authority's draft budget for 2007/08 and seeking their approval for the proposals contained in the report. He explained that the report listed the various pressures and constraints faced by the Authority in determining its priorities and drawing up its budget for 2007/08 and that the proposals presented to members represented a 'standstill' budget with no capacity for any significant growth. In the past the Authority had been fortunate in the fact that it could underpin its budget with the underspends from previous years. Unfortunately this would not be the case for the coming year as all provisions had now been exhausted. In reply to a request that Treasury reports should be presented in a more understandable format using less technical terminology, the Treasurer advised that he sympathised with members on this matter but these types of reports had to be presented in a format that complied with the requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA). Councillor E C George advised that the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) had announced that local authorities should, from 2008 onwards, be looking at setting three yearly budgets. He was also of the view that for future years it would be good practice for the Authority if its Executive Panel was involved with the budget setting process from an early stage. The Chairman agreed with this view. It was:

Resolved: -

- i. to approve the Authority's draft budget for 2007/08 at £29.456m*
- ii. that the constituent authorities be advised of the provisional contributions required for 2007/08 as per Appendix B of the report;*
- iii. to approve the Prudential Indicators set out in Appendix C;*
- iv. to approve the Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Plan set out in Appendix D;*
- v. to approve the draft capital programme for 2007/08 and associated methods of financing; and*
- vi. if any changes transpire before 31st January 2007, to delegate the Authority's powers to alter the budget level to the Executive Panel or, if any savings transpire after this date but before 15th February 2007, that this power be delegated to the Treasurer in consultation with the Chairman, Chief Fire Officer and Clerk; and*
- vii. that the Executive Panel be included in the financial planning process for future years.*

9) Delegation of powers in relation to receiving the Annual Audit Letter

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) seeking the Authority to delegate its powers in respect of receiving the Annual Audit Letter 2005/06 to its Executive Panel. Members were advised by the Treasurer that the Wales Audit Office (WAO), the Authority's external auditor, regrettably could not finalise and

translate the Annual Audit Letter 2005/06 in time to present it to the current meeting. Members:

Resolved: - *to delegate the Authority's powers in respect of formally receiving the Annual Audit Letter 2005/06 to the Executive Panel.*

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) left the meeting at this juncture.

10) Estimated savings at day crewed stations

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) introduced his report (previously circulated) updating members on the financial savings realised as a result of operating the new shift times at day crewed stations. The background to the change in shift times, the data on the number of calls attended during the new evening period when personnel were in attendance at stations compared to the previous morning times when personnel were in attendance on station, and an estimate of the financial savings realised by the Authority as a result of the change were detailed in the report and its appendices. Although the primary objective of the change had been to match shift times to peak call out periods it was extremely pleasing to report that this change had also generated financial savings. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) advised members that the estimated financial savings figures contained in the report were extremely conservative estimates. It was also pleasing to note from the data provided that the number of incidents attended over a 24 hour period was reducing year on year. This indicated that the Authority's community fire safety work was also paying dividends. The Vice-Chairman remarked that the report reinforced the success of the Authority's decision to change the shift times and suggested that no further reports were required on this matter. It was:

Resolved: - *to note the contents of the report and that no further reports would be required on this subject.*

11.20am: the Treasurer left the meeting at this point.

11) Community fire safety activities on day crewed stations

In introducing his report (previously circulated), informing members of the level of community safety activities on day crewed stations prior to and since the change in shift pattern, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the report should be considered in conjunction with the previous business item. He then detailed the information listed in the report and appendices before answering members' questions. Councillor W J Chorlton registered his concern that the Service, as a result of the change in shift times at day crewed stations, may be failing on the community fire safety (CFS) aspect of its business as personnel were not available at reasonable times of day to gain access to people's homes for the purpose of undertaking home fire safety checks. The Vice-Chairman

commented that the report before members concentrated solely on the community safety activities undertaken by personnel at day crewed stations. It was important to remember that the Service's CFS work extended far wider than day crewed stations: CFS staff, practitioners and retained duty system staff were all involved in this sphere of work. He was therefore of the view that it would be useful if members were provided with a report that detailed the amount of CFS work undertaken by all personnel across the North Wales area.

11.50am: Councillor W T Owen left the meeting at this juncture.

Councillor George also requested that the report include details of the CFS service's accessibility to the public along with details of the levels of interaction between the Service and local authorities on community safety issues. The Chief Fire Officer welcomed the inclusion of the latter and explained to members that he had recently written to the leaders and chief executives of all the constituent authorities requesting their cooperation and support on community safety issues. Members:

Resolved: - to note the information provided and that a report be prepared for presentation to the Authority at its next meeting detailing the amount of community fire safety work undertaken across North Wales by wholetime, day crewed and retained stations and by the Service's Community Fire Safety team. The report should also include details of the levels of interaction between the Service and the local authorities in relation to community safety work.

12) Rank to Role

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) introduced his report (previously circulated) updating members on the substantive move from rank to role in North Wales Fire and Rescue Service. He explained that the purpose of the report was to give members the background information that would assist them to understand the procedure which had taken place in the rank to role assimilation process. This information would also help them to deal with the letters they had received from the FBU and from individual members of staff who felt aggrieved by the process. By means of a PowerPoint presentation the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) detailed the background to the rank to role assimilation process which emanated from the 2003 Pay and Conditions of Service Agreement. He gave details of the various NJC Circulars which provided guidance to fire and rescue authorities on the arrangements for the temporary assimilation of staff from the former rank pay structure to the new role pay structure, the substantive move from rank to role, as well as guidance on pay protection issues. Members were also advised that as the guidance issued by the NJC did not provide a definitive process for the move from rank to role the three fire and rescue authorities in Wales had established a joint task and finish group, on which the FBU were represented, to create a model for implementation in Wales. Following the completion of its work and the creation of a model, which incorporated the NJC's recommended measurable system for

job sizing and a procedure for appeals, the model had been implemented on a Wales-wide basis from 1st July 2006. Prior to answering members' questions the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) explained that the current position in North Wales regarding the process and the financial implications for the Authority were as detailed in his report.

In reply to members' questions the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) informed the Authority that all appeals were heard internally and that there was no member involvement in the process, but that a Principal Officer from another Welsh fire and rescue authority would be present at the appeal hearing for process verification purposes. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed members that with a view to providing an optimum consultation process the FBU regionally had been regularly briefed on the task and finish group's progress in developing a model for implementation. As a number of members stated that they were slightly perplexed by the whole process the Service's Development Manager offered to furnish them with a copy of the Rank to Role Module and Matrix document. This document would assist them in understanding the process followed and provide them with the scoring system used to determine the role assimilation. The Vice-Chairman and Councillor W J Chorlton enquired whether it would be possible for the Authority, in order not to alienate loyal personnel, to consider providing pay protection to current postholders affected by the assimilation process for the duration of their careers in their current role. Following a discussion it was:

Resolved: -

- i. to note the report;*
- ii. that a copy of the Rank to Role module and matrix be circulated to all members in order to clarify the procedure followed and the roles to which ranks had been assimilated; and*
- iii. upon completion of the Rank to Role assimilation process a further report on the outcomes of the assimilations of the other management levels (Station Manager, Group Manager and Area Manager) be presented to members, on 19th March 2007. This should detail the results of the latest assimilation stage and also include the likely costs to the Authority of awarding pay protection to current postholders for the duration of their careers in that particular role, if the Authority decided to provide such protection.*

13) Consultation on the Draft Regulations on Members' Allowances

In the Clerk's absence his report (previously circulated) seeking the Authority to agree on a response to the WAG consultation on the Local Authorities (Allowances for Members) (Wales) Regulations 2007 was introduced by the Acting Monitoring Officer. The Acting Monitoring Officer proceeded to detail the information contained in the report and the Clerk's advice in relation to the approach the Authority should take in responding to the Consultation.

Resolved: - that a response be sent to WAG, by 21st December 2006, on the consultation on the Local Authorities (Allowances for Members) (Wales) Regulations 2007 as per the advice detailed in paragraph 6 of the report.

14) Notice of Motion

Councillor C Shone presented the following motion for members' consideration: "I the undersigned request that the Fire Authority gives consideration to arranging a visit for all Authority members to the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh in the near future."

Councillor Shone explained that following the Walesfire 2006 Conference he and another member had discussed the practicalities and benefit to Authority members of visiting the Fire Service College. They had come to the conclusion that such a visit would be useful to members in their role on the Authority and would contribute towards their development programme. Members were informed by Mr Gary Brandrick, the Service's Development Manager, that since the College had become an independent commercial enterprise the only part of the College's services North Wales Fire and Rescue Service procured was its fire ground training provision. Following a discussion and after taking into account budgetary pressures it was:

Resolved: - that a one day visit be arranged for all interested members to the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh and that details of the number of members interested in participating in the visit be collated and reported to the Executive Panel at its meeting on 24th January 2007.

15) Presentation on the impact of the Attendance Management Policy

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave members a presentation on the Authority's new Attendance Management Policy and its impact on the Service's sickness absence rates to date. The objective of the new policy, which had been in operation since April, was to improve the Service's sickness absence levels by encouraging employees to return to work as soon as possible. Every assistance was given to personnel to return to work and, if required and appropriate, the return to work could be undertaken on a phased basis. Alternative duties were also offered to those personnel who were unable to continue in their previous roles. The Service recognised that each day lost through absence represented reduced efficiency, compromised quality and had a negative effect on morale. Consequently it had a detrimental effect on the organisation's capacity to deliver a quality service to the public. In addition it also equated to inefficient use of taxpayers' money. Members were advised that during 2005/06 the annual cost of sickness absence per employee for North Wales Fire and Rescue Service equated on average to £727 per person for 10.7 days sick leave, or £68 per day per person. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer proceeded to explain that under the new system the Service had tightened the policy for reviewing attendance. Various methods had been incorporated into the Policy in order to

reduce the rates of sickness absence; these included reducing referral times to the Occupational Health Unit and permitting personnel to self-refer themselves to the Unit, reducing the number of "trigger days" from 8 to 5 before action was taken on reviewing sickness absence records and encouraging employees to take ownership of their own periods of sickness absences by following the correct notification and return to work procedures. Line Managers had been given the appropriate training to assist them to proactively manage attendance, to monitor sickness levels, to offer support to their staff and where necessary to implement the enforcement process in line with the Service's capability or discipline policy. New members of staff, as part of their induction training, were given an awareness session on the Attendance Management Policy.

Since April 2006 a new Occupational Health Service Level Agreement had been in place. Following a tendering process the previous providers, Flintshire County Council, had been successful in tendering for the new revised agreement. Included in the new contract were 16 key performance indicators for the contract's functional requirements, the purpose of which were to measure and ensure service delivery and to evaluate effectiveness. Members were given an overview of the stress risk assessments/special workplace risk assessments; counselling services available to personnel; self-referral system; post incident referral system; domiciliary visits and health and fitness promotion advice available.

Prior to its introduction letters had been sent to all General Practitioners in North Wales raising awareness of the Policy that the Service would be operating and advising them that alternative duties to personnel's normal duties were available as options for an earlier return to work. In addition to this, and with a view to improving all personnel's general health and well-being, the Service was actively pursuing the Corporate Health Award. Pursuance of this award would see the Service overhauling its entire policy making procedure in order to ensure that all policies were transparent, joined-up and gave consideration to staff's health and welfare.

Although the Policy had only been operational since April the Service had already begun to reap its benefits with the number of days lost to sickness already showing a decrease.

Replying to a question from Councillor S C Jones officers advised that personnel were still using the Fire and Rescue Services' rehabilitation centres. Individuals could either self refer, or be referred by the Occupational Health physician, to these centres.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Chief Fire Officer for his presentation.

16) Informative

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) presented the Authority with the latest issue of the 'Informative' magazine. Members:

Resolved: - to accept the publication

17) Urgent Matters

Letter from Barmouth Town Council: the Acting Monitoring Officer informed members that a letter had been received from Barmouth Town Council following the Authority's approval of its RRP for 2007/08. The Town Council had written to the Chairman after receiving representations from the Barmouth Residents Association in relation to the decision to relocate the dual role appliance, currently stationed at Barmouth, to Dolgellau. The Authority's decision had been discussed with the Deputy Chief Fire Officer during his visit to the Town Council in November but the Town Council was still of the view that their concerns had not been "satisfactorily addressed". The Acting Monitoring Officer read the entire letter, which listed the Town Council's concerns, to members. Although members accepted that the RRP had been approved at its last meeting and that work was already underway to implement the agreed changes they were of the view, having considered the points raised by the Town Council, that the RRP Working Group should give further consideration to the policy relating to the relocation of dual role appliances at its next meeting. Prior to the vote being taken the Chairman sought the Acting Monitoring Officer's advice as to whether he would be permitted to vote on the matter. He was advised by the Acting Monitoring Officer that he would be allowed to cast his vote because, although the matter had been raised by Barmouth Town Council of which he was a member, the proposal before the Authority was to revisit the decision on a North Wales wide basis. It was therefore:

Resolved: - that consideration be given at the RRP Working Group's next meeting on 30th January 2007 to the Authority's policy, under its RRP for 2007/08, on the location of the dual role appliances. Pending the issue being discussed at the above meeting the relocation process to be suspended and an update report to be prepared for the Working Group giving details of the appliances that have been withdrawn/relocated to date.

Chief Fire Officer's letter to staff: Councillor W J Chorlton expressed his concern about a letter sent by the Chief Fire Officer, on 11th October 2006, to all staff following the recent increase in the number of fire deaths in the region. A number of staff had contacted him stating that they felt the letter was insensitive, and that it made them feel undervalued and unworthy of their roles within the Service. Councillor Chorlton was of the view that the recent rise in the number of deaths was not due to inadequacies on the part of staff. Criticism should be levelled from the top down and should include Authority members as they had the ultimate responsibility for policy ratification. The Chairman advised Councillor

Chorlton that he had also received complaints about the tone of the letter. He had discussed these concerns with the Chief Fire Officer who had assured him that the contents of the letter, which was a generic piece of correspondence sent to all staff, was levelled at all personnel. Members were informed by the Chief Fire Officer that the terms used throughout the letter was either "we" or "us", not one reference was made in the singular format. The Chief Fire Officer proceeded to explain that his decision to issue the letter to all personnel had been taken against a backdrop of an unacceptable rise in the number of accidental fire deaths in dwellings in North Wales since April 2006. In the letter he had asked all staff to cooperate fully with the Task Group which he had established, for information and evidence gathering purposes, with a view to assisting the Authority to form policies, strategies and procedures to tackle what was a growing problem and a worrying trend. Following a discussion the Chief Fire Officer agreed that a copy of the letter, which had been intended solely for internal circulation, could be provided to members present at the current meeting who had not seen a copy. It was therefore:

Resolved: - that a copy of the Chief Fire Officer's letter to all personnel on the recent increase in the number of fire deaths in the area be circulated to all members present at the meeting who had not seen a copy.

Councillor G Williams enquired whether the Chief Fire Officer had received satisfactory responses to the letters he had sent to the leaders and chief executives of the six unitary authorities requesting their assistance in improving communication channels and enhancing collaborative working between various local authority departments and the Fire and Rescue Service in an attempt to reduce the number of fire deaths and provide better protection for the most vulnerable citizens in the community. Replying to Councillor Williams the Chief Fire Officer advised that since a copy of the letter had been sent to all members he had received a reply from all councils, either directly from the chief executives or from their respective social services' department. In response to a further request from Councillor Williams on whether copies of the replies could be shared with members, the Chief Fire Officer advised that he was not in a position at present to share the correspondence with them. He indicated his willingness to discuss their own council's response with them on an individual basis.

The Vice-Chairman reminded members that it was important that each and every one of them was proactive within their own local authorities in promoting community safety issues.

The Chairman informed members that it was recommended that the remaining item 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 item 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

18) "Fire 1st" – Rhyl Community Fire Station Project

Prior to the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) introducing his report (previously circulated) which provided members with a further update on the Rhyl FireFirst Community Fire Station project, members were given a presentation on the project by Mr Alyn Edwards, the Service's County Safety Manager for the Denbighshire area. In his presentation Mr Edwards detailed the background to the project, the research work undertaken by the Project Board which included visits to various types of community fire stations across the UK, details of the partnerships forged with various agencies and organisations within Denbighshire which had shown an interest in using the facilities that would be available, and the engagement process with the local community during the open day at the station. Mr Edwards stressed that it was important to bear in mind that over 33% of all community fire safety referrals in the Denbighshire area were received via partnership working ventures. By means of presentation slides members were able to see an artist's impression of the proposed fire station and saw floor plans for the station. Members were advised that the WAG had formally offered financial support to the project up to a maximum of £400k from its Community Fire Safety Budget. Confirmation had also been received recently from the WAG's Department for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks that it would be willing to support the project and award it an Environmental and Town Improvement Grant towards the external building work. Other funding bids were in the process of being compiled and submitted to various organisations.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) then presented his report and advised members that the Executive Panel, at its meeting on 12th December, had recommended that the Authority should approve the project. He detailed the proposed timescale for the tendering and construction process, the estimated running costs for the community side of the station along with the costs to the Authority if it decided to abandon the project at this stage. He also emphasised that provision had been made for the cost of the Project in the draft budget for 2007/08, which the Authority had earlier approved. Councillor J A Smith, a member of the Project Group, reiterated the research work undertaken and the positive feedback received from the local community. He also reminded members that the Fire and Rescue Authority's primary objective was to protect the community and save lives. In his view the realisation of this project would assist with this aim.

Councillors W J Chorlton and S C Jones expressed their concerns about the project's long term economic viability. In their view the fact that the majority of organisations and partners, which had shown an interest in using the facilities, were either registered charities or local authority based agencies was a cause

for concern. These bodies had limited amounts of financial resources at their disposal and would therefore be unable to pay commercial rates for hiring the facilities. Councillor G Williams, as a councillor in the Rhyl area, remarked that he was saddened by fellow members' attitudes on this matter and advised members that East Rhyl was in dire need of facilities of this calibre. He also offered to advise officers of other funding streams that may be available to the Authority to secure the Project's long term viability. Following an in-depth discussion and by a majority vote it was:

Resolved: - to

- i. approve the funding of this project in the sum of £2.482m to enable competitive tenders to be sought from building contractors; and*
- ii. that Option 2 is the preferred funding option.*

The meeting concluded at 1.45pm.