

**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
EXECUTIVE PANEL**

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 15 July 2013 at Fire and Rescue Headquarters, St Asaph. Meeting commenced at 2pm.

PRESENT

Cllr M Ll Davies (Chair)	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr L W Davies	Anglesey County Council
Cllr R Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr A Evans	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr J M Evans	Anglesey County Council
Cllr H McGuill	Flintshire County Council
Cllr R E Parry	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr P Pemberton	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council

ALSO PRESENT:

C Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer); D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); P Claydon, R Simmons and R Fairhead (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); G Brandrick (Senior Fire Safety Manager); G W Griffiths (Senior Development Manager); K Roberts (Senior Operations Manager); L Roberts (Senior Control and Business Continuity Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); J Brown (Acting Finance Manager); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer).

Apologies:

Cllr B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
Cllr P R Lewis	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr P W Owen	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr W R Owen	Gwynedd Council
S A Smith	Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive
K Finch	Treasurer

At the beginning of the meeting, the Chair informed members that he had great pleasure in announcing that the Service had achieved two significant awards recently. The DCFO explained that the Service had received an Inspire Wales Award: Welsh at Work which acknowledges the active steps taken by North Wales Fire and Rescue Service to promote and increase the use of the Welsh Language resulting in a positive impact within the organisation.

The Service had also achieved the Corporate Health Standard Platinum seal of approval. The Corporate Health Standard is a Healthy Working Wales programme and is a national mark of quality awarded at Bronze, Silver, Gold and Platinum levels. The Platinum level is reserved for exemplar employers demonstrating business excellence and taking full account of their corporate social responsibility.

The Service had previously attained the gold corporate health award but had applied in 2013 for the platinum award. The auditors were extremely pleased with the submission and described it as outstanding and have now asked staff from the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service to mentor other organisations, both in the public and private sector. Further information about the award will be provided at the next Executive Panel meeting in October.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

1.1 None.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 MAY 2013

2.1 The minutes of the last meeting were submitted for approval.

2.2 **RESOLVED to approve the minutes.**

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 There were no matters arising.

4 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

4.1 The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) was presented to members for comment, prior to it being presented with the full set of accounts. The AGS is a way of reporting publicly the extent to which an Authority complies with its own Code of Corporate Governance

4.2 The Finance Manager delivered a presentation detailing each principle of the AGS and how the Authority has monitored the effectiveness of its governance arrangements. The Finance Manager also explained the Authority's planned actions to ensure it maintains and continuously improves its governance arrangements.

4.3 Cllr McGuill asked how often the risk register is reviewed and by whom. The DCFO explained that there are two forms of risk registers in place. The business continuity management risk register has been in place for several years and has been tested in real time situations as well as by exercises and the high level corporate risk register. This has been in existence for the last three years, and discussions with Internal Audit are on-going regarding some of the details.

4.4 The Clerk advised that the risk register should be strategic as well as sufficiently operational and suggested that next year's AGS should include more detail on the partnership/collaboration work.

4.5 **RESOLVED to approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2012-13.**

5 REVIEWS OF GOVERNANCE

- 5.1 Ron Price from the Wales Audit Office gave members an overview of the work that the Wales Audit Office does in relation to the annual governance statement, across the three fire and rescue services in Wales.
- 5.2 Mr Price explained that the WAO staff had undertaken field work between December and March and that this will feed into learning events and improvements publications. It was considered that generally governance should be given wider and deeper provenance which would go beyond the governance statement in the statement of accounts document.
- 5.3 Another issue Mr Price commented on was that although the Authority had a high level of governance it should ensure that its partners also have the same regard to governance issues. Collaboration was an important part of the NIC's work and it was important to ensure that responsibility and accountability are apportioned equally between the Services.
- 5.4 It was noted that the evidence to support compliance had improved and the document contained clearer, more comprehensive information.
- 5.5 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2012-13

- 6.1 The Corporate Planning Manager presented the performance monitoring report which covered the complete 2012/13 reporting period from 1st April 2012 – 31st March 2013. Members had received a presentation on the provisional unaudited performance figures for 2012-13 at the June Authority meeting.
- 6.2 The Corporate Planning Manager led Members through the report and highlighted the following issues:
- 6.3 There had been a slight increase in the number of people sustaining injuries in accidental fires in dwellings compared to the previous year. Although the vast majority of injuries are categorised as 'slight' they were significant enough to confirm the importance of maintaining a high emphasis on prevention. Cllr Pemberton questioned the definition of precautionary check-ups and first aid given at scene and the Corporate Planning Manager explained that it was a national definition and that she would send the exact wording of the definition to Cllr Pemberton.
- 6.4 15% of dwellings that experienced a fire did not have a smoke alarm; this was equal to the previous year. However, this figure could be construed as being misleading as the total number of accidental fires in dwellings in each year was lower. It was agreed to provide numbers rather than percentages in future reports.

- 6.5 Although fewer home fire safety checks had been delivered in 2012-13, 35% of the HFSCs had been completed following a referral from a partner organisation which meant that they were being delivered to more vulnerable people in the community.
- 6.6 It was pleasing to note that the overall number of fires had reduced since the previous year; however, there had been an increase in special service incidents other than road traffic collisions. The increase in special service incidents could be attributed in part to the adverse weather experienced during the period: ship ran aground in gales during April 2012; localised flooding during the wetter than average spring and summer 2012 and the significant flooding at the end of November 2012.
- 6.7 There was also a reduction in malicious false alarm calls and this was considered to be a result of the good challenging procedure used by call handlers.
- 6.8 In response to a question from Cllr L W Davies, it was confirmed that the non-domestic premises included commercial and public buildings such as hospitals and hotels. It was also confirmed that empty premises are monitored and the Arson Reduction Team works closely with the police to share intelligence regarding incidents and potential issues. Members were also informed that specific areas are targeted based on intelligence and data and that firefighters from Wrexham fire station are currently engaging with young people in the local area and attending their youth clubs together with the police.
- 6.9 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

7 ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT

- 7.1 Ron Price from the Wales Audit Office presented the annual improvement report which covered the Authority's delivery and evaluation of services for 2011-12 and its planning of improvement for 2012-13. This Auditor General for Wales is required to undertake this work in accordance with the Local Government Measure 2009.
- 7.2 Mr Price was pleased to report that it was a positive document for the Authority and summarised the conclusion to members, explaining that although the Authority is managing its improvement programme well, it needs to do more to compare its performance to other, similar bodies. The Authority's evaluation during 2012-13 had improved as had the public engagement work. It was noted that a public engagement and consultation strategy is currently being developed and will be presented to members later in the year.

- 7.3 The Auditor General for Wales expects the Authority to incorporate the findings in future work and proposals for improvement included:
- continue to develop corporate processes to promote public engagement
 - develop methods to use and evaluate the results of public engagement activities more widely, and inform the public how their input influenced what the Authority does
 - using more comparative data which will help the Authority explain its achievements and future challenges.

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

8 WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

- 8.1 ACFO Fairhead presented the report which sought members' approval prior to its formal submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner.
- 8.2 Each year, the Service is required to produce a detailed report which sets out progress made towards meeting the targets outlined in the Service's Welsh Language Scheme. The report is now submitted to the Welsh Language Commissioner following the abolition of the Welsh Language Board and the arrangements under the new Welsh Language Measure.
- 8.3 The three FRS in Wales continue to work together and will be ready to deal with the new Standards to be announced shortly by the Welsh Government. Last year, a positive response to the monitoring report was received from the Commissioner who welcomed specific elements such as the recruitment of Welsh Language Champions, recognition of those staff learning Welsh and the investment in translation services and training.
- 8.4 As reported at the beginning of the meeting, the Service had recently received notable recognition for its work in promoting the Welsh language by winning an Inspire Wales Award 2013 in the category of Welsh at Work.
- 8.5 Cllr L W Davies welcomed, and praised, the developments with regards to Welsh in the workplace, and was also pleased to note that the Service cooperates with other organisations in promoting the language.
- 8.6 Cllr J M Evans stated that he would have preferred a more concise version of the report and Cllr Pemberton was concerned about the cost involved with the Welsh language work especially in the current economic climate and felt that in order to put fires out all that was needed was water. In answer to this comment, the DCFO stated that the Authority and Service's main aim is prevention which involves educating people and in order to do this effectively in North Wales it was important to communicate in the preferred language of individuals. The DCFO confirmed that the main cost associated with the Welsh language work is the training element which is considered to be money well spent. Cllr L W Davies supported the DCFO's comments and stated that the purpose of the fire and rescue service is to save lives and that some people prefer to communicate in their own language and a Welsh language policy is crucial to ensure this for the people of North Wales.

- 8.7 The Clerk commented that it was a sensitive subject and that the Authority and Service needs to invest appropriately in the Welsh language.
- 8.8 **RESOLVED to note the progress made in relation to the Welsh Language Scheme and approve the 2012-13 monitoring report prior to formal submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner.**
- 9 IMPROVEMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP: VERBAL UPDATE
- 9.1 The DCFO reported that the final meeting of the working group had been held earlier in the day to look at proposed recommendations to be included in the Improvement Plan to be taken forward to the full Authority meeting in September.
- 9.2 The working group had discussed budgetary issues for the next three years and focused on the fact that any reduction in the budget would have a disproportionate effect on fire cover in North Wales. The group had also looked at the current fire cover in the Service and the challenges in order to maintain 24/7 cover across rural areas using the current retained duty system. It is long recognised that the system is not suitable everywhere however there are some areas where it continues to work effectively.
- 9.3 The Working Group had resolved to take forward the following two improvement objectives as part of its programme to improve services during the coming year:
- To seek to maintain service delivery using innovative and creative solutions to limit the extent of budgetary impact on constituent authorities
 - Endorse the use of a variety of management solutions to optimise fire cover in North Wales, within financial constraints.