

## **NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2013 at GreenThumb, St Asaph Business Park. Meeting commenced at 2pm.

### **PRESENT**

#### **Councillor**

M LI Davies (Chair)  
P R Lewis (Deputy Chair)  
L W Davies  
R Davies  
B Dunn  
A Evans  
A Jones  
H McGuill  
D A MacRae  
D J Miles  
R E Parry  
M A Reece  
J R Skelland  
W O Thomas

#### **Representing**

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

### **Also present:**

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); G Owens (Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); P Claydon and R Simmons (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); S Forrest (Accountant, Treasurer's Department, Conwy County Borough Council); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer).

### **APOLOGIES**

#### **Councillor**

A I Dunbar  
J G Evans  
J M Evans  
C Hughes  
L A W Jones  
G Lowe  
P Owen  
W R Owen  
W T Owen  
P H Pemberton  
W P Shotton  
A Tansley  
R Wright

#### **Representing**

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

Also, C Everett (Clerk) and R Fairhead (Assistant Chief Fire Officer).

## 1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 None.

## 2 FLOOD UPDATE

2.1 The Chief Fire Officer gave Members an update about the flooding situation that day, along the North Wales coast. The Service was working in collaboration with the RNLI, police, local authorities, mountain rescue teams and other partners. ACFO Fairhead was co-ordinating the response at Gold Command level.

2.2 Cllr McGuill requested that the Members' thanks be passed on to all those involved in providing the emergency response.

At this juncture, Cllr M Reece left the meeting due to concerns about flooding in Bagillt.

Prior to moving on to the budget options report, the Chair reminded Members about the Emergency Services' Carol Service to be held on Monday 9<sup>th</sup> December, 7.30pm at the Cathedral, St Asaph.

The Chair also thanked GreenThumb for letting the Authority use its facilities at short notice.

## 3 URGENT MATTERS

3.1 Members agreed to receive an update on the industrial dispute during part II of the meeting.

## 4 BUDGET OPTIONS 2014-15

4.1 The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that it was unusual for an extraordinary meeting to be held in December to discuss the budget. Due to the recent local government's financial settlement announced by the Welsh Government it was considered prudent to hold an additional meeting to review the previous decisions of the Authority and the recommendations of the Executive Panel about the budget prior to Members approving the draft budget for 2014-15 at the meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> December. Members had previously received the budget options report and an equality risk assessment of the options was tabled at the meeting.

Cllr J R Skelland arrived at this juncture.

4.2 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer led Members through the report and reminded them of decisions they had previously taken around the draft improvement objectives and the way forward with the budget for 2014-15. The DCFO advised Members that in light of the recent financial settlement should they wish to change their previous decision, and instead have a reduction in the budget, there would not be enough time to consult on the decision between now and April 2014.

- 4.3 The Treasurer explained that compared to the previous three years there was no element of protection for local government in the financial settlement and this had been quite unexpected. He once again reminded Members that they were not on the Fire and Rescue Authority to represent their own constituency; however, they did need to be mindful of the local government settlement.
- 4.4 In 2010, Members had decided to make budget reductions of similar amounts over a period of three years rather than taking a big cut in year 1. The Treasurer explained that with a flat line or slight reduction in year 1, then the impact immediately moves to the second year, and the report discusses the risks and opportunities in taking the same approach for the next three years. This was recommended by members of the Executive Panel on 28 October 2013 and the Treasurer explained that was also his preferred option rather than use the funds held in reserves to make up the budget for one year as this would cause many more issues for 2015-16. Also, in adopting this approach, there would be more time to plan and consider impacts and risks for 2015-16 onwards. However, the Treasurer emphasised paragraph 14 of the report that this was a recommendation for one year only and that it was not suitable long-term without further significant service reform or some form of budget protection.
- 4.5 The Deputy Clerk also drew members' attention to paragraph 14 and the need for the Improvement Planning Working Group to consider and assess in detail future finance requirements of the Authority. He advised that the Fire and Rescue Authority needs to consult with constituent authorities about the requirements and the future operational needs and what that would mean in terms of funding.
- 4.6 The CFO informed Members that as part of the consultation process on the draft improvement objectives, the CFO, DCFO and Chair had visited the constituent authorities to provide a briefing about the FRA's position. The CFO offered reassurance to Members that councillors across the constituent authorities seemed to be extremely supportive of the Authority's situation. Cllr Dunn commented that he had chaired the Flintshire Council briefing and endorsed the CFO's comments about the support shown by councillors.
- 4.7 In response to a question about comparing the budget situation with English FRAs, it was explained that it was a completely different situation for them as they had an influence over the council tax and they had a different funding system to the FRAs in Wales. The CFO cautioned Members as to the potential impact of not adequately funding operational training and equipment.
- 4.8 Cllr McGuill supported the recommendations and felt the Authority needed to be prudent.

- 4.9 Cllr Lewis supported the Deputy Clerk's suggestion that over the coming months the Authority should have a forensic look at the Service which will give added weight to take whatever recommendations that are made as a result of that piece of work to the relevant local authorities. The CFO supported the suggestion and commented that even without budget pressures it made sense to periodically review the service and the balance of prevention and reaction. **Members agreed to support the suggestion that a piece of work is undertaken to assess all services delivered by the NWFRS.**
- 4.10 Prior to moving on to the recommendations contained in the report, the meeting was adjourned in order for Members to read the equality impact assessment tabled at the meeting. Having reconvened, the Chair moved on to the recommendations in the report and Members:
- 4.11 **RESOLVED to**
- (i) approve the Equality Impact Assessment for the budget setting process;**
  - (ii) note the risks around setting a balanced budget for 2014-15;**
  - (iii) confirm that they wish the 2014-15 budget to be constructed on the basis of the current level of service provision;**
  - (iv) accept the recommendations of the Executive Panel that the budget should be frozen for a fourth year and that £1 million should be moved into a general reserve which could be used to cover any overspend which might arise through increased activity.**

## PART II

### 5 INDUSTRIAL DISPUTE

- 5.1 The CFO informed Members about the latest developments with the industrial dispute and that a full report on activity and action to date will be provided to Members at the meeting to be held on 16<sup>th</sup> December.
- 5.2 The FBU had held a further ballot asking its members to agree to a mandate on action short of strike (ASOS). The ballot closed on 4<sup>th</sup> December and FBU members had voted in favour of the proposal and the FBU now holds a mandate to undertake ASOS. This ballot included Control staff and the Scottish FRS for the first time since the dispute started.
- 5.3 As yet no information had been received about the form of action/inaction the FBU will take. As expected, officers have been working and planning in anticipation and legal advice has been obtained about partial performance of a contract. The legal advice is that the minute an individual refuses to perform even 1% of his or her contract, then there is no obligation on the Authority to pay them for the other 99% of the contract.

- 5.4 To date the dispute has been between the FBU and Government, however, ASOS brings it to a more local level. This could be a long-term situation and the CFO's advice to Members was for the Authority to continue to repudiate the ASOS and partial performance.
- 5.5 Members were asked to delegate authority to the CFO in conjunction with the Chair, Deputy Chair, Treasurer and Clerk to deal with this fast moving situation in the most appropriate manner.
- 5.6 **RESOLVED to approve the request for delegated authority.**