

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 17 October 2022 virtually via Zoom. Meeting commenced at 10.00am.

Councillor

Dylan Rees (Chair)
Bryan Apsley
Marion Bateman
Carol Beard
Brian Blakeley
Tina Claydon
Chrissy Gee
John Brynmor Hughes
Marc Jones
Gwynfor Owen
Arwyn Herald Roberts
Austin Roberts
Gareth A Roberts
Rondo Roberts
Dale Selvester
Rob Triggs
Mark Young

Representing

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

Also present:

Dawn Docx
Stewart Forshaw
Richard Fairhead
Helen MacArthur
Stuart Millington
Shân Morris
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
Lisa Allington
Helen Howard
Tracey Williams
Steve Morris
Mike Whiteley

Chief Fire Officer
Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Officer
Treasurer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Executive Assistant
Head of Finance and Procurement
Head of Corporate Communications
ICT Technical Manager
Audit Wales

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Neil Coverley
Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
Alan Hughes
Chris Hughes
Beverley Parry-Jones
Paul Rogers
Nigel Smith

Representing

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

ABSENT

Councillor

Adele Davies-Cooke
Jeff Evans
Gareth Sandilands
Ken Taylor

Representing

Flintshire County Council
Anglesey County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Anglesey County Council

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Cllr. Rob Triggs declared an interest in Item 16 (Part II) and would therefore be leaving the meeting prior to that item.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

- 3.1 There was no notice of urgent matters.

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JUNE 2022

- 4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2022 were submitted for approval.
- 4.2 **RESOLVED to approve the minutes as a true and correct record of the meetings held.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

- 5.1 6.1 Wild Fires – ACFO Millington confirmed that, following incidents that had taken place in the early part of the year, a Wild Fire review had been carried out. The recommendations arising from this review with regards to equipment and kit were being worked through by the Service Leadership Team.
- 5.2 7.4 (ii) - it was noted that the meeting of the Executive Panel diarised for 19 September did not take place due to the funeral service for the Monarch.

6 CHAIR'S REPORT

- 6.1 It was noted that a written report had been supplied for this meeting to provide Members with information on the meetings and events attended by the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority in their official capacities between June and October 2022.

- 6.2 The Chair highlighted the area of the report that noted the visits to various fire stations alongside the Deputy Chair. These visits had been valuable and had been positively received by staff. The visit to Deeside Fire Station had been postponed due to illness but that visit would take place in due course.
- 6.3 The Chair raised one item not included in the report, this being the funeral of Michelle Corbett-Jones, a serving member of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) who had died suddenly on 22 September. Michelle had been held in very high regard by her colleagues and it had been poignant to attend the ceremony.
- 6.4 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

7 FINANCIAL OUTTURN 2022-23

- 7.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the Financial Outturn 2022-23 report which provided members with an update on the revenue and capital expenditure position for 2022/23, as at 31 August 2022.
- 7.2 Members were advised that any forward-looking financial report given at this time should be regarded with caution given the uncertain economic and financial times.
- 7.3 At the end of 2021/22 a number of deferred items of expenditure had been carried forward and placed into earmarked reserves. In addition, the pay negotiations for 2022/23 had not yet been settled and would create a recurring cost pressure. The overall position was that expenditure would exceed budget but cost pressures from the 2022/23 financial year would be managed by using reserves rather than applying an additional levy on local authorities.
- 7.4 The overview of spend by type and the projected year end position was noted. A growing area of concern related to capital finance charges which included the cost of borrowing. The significant increase in interest rates in recent weeks would need to be monitored closely.
- 7.5 The Service was congratulated in being prudent in building up reserves.
- 7.6 It was noted that the biggest variance was in staffing costs. In December 2021, the estimate had been a 2% uplift for the pay award but since then there had been an offer of 5%. This would mean the budget setting process for 2023-24 will have to be more prudent as the reserves will have been depleted due to the 2022-23 pay award.

- 7.7 **RESOLVED to:**
- (i) **note the draft revenue and capital outturn projections for the 2022/23 financial year, as detailed within the report;**
 - (ii) **note the risks associated with inflation and supply chain issues;**
 - (iii) **note the risks associated with the ongoing pay negotiations; and**
 - (iv) **approve the use of earmarked and general fund reserves.**

8 ENERGY CONTRACT RENEWAL

8.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the Energy Contract Renewal report, which provided Members with an update on the energy contracts for the supply of gas and electricity across the estate of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority).

8.2 ACFO MacArthur was congratulated on the actions that had been taken in order to obtain the best possible deal.

- 8.3 **RESOLVED to note the:**
- (i) **contractual arrangements for the purchase of gas and electricity; and**
 - (ii) **associated risk and cost implications from 1 October 2022.**

9 NEW TRAINING CENTRE

9.1 DCFO Forshaw presented the report on the new training centre which detailed the work undertaken to date on the production of a detailed business case for the option of a new training and development centre for the Service. This would enable better service delivery and ensure firefighter safety for at least the next 25 years.

9.2 The opportunity was provided for Members to ask questions following the presentation and it was noted that a new training and development centre would help to fulfil the eight core competency areas for firefighters.

9.3 It was agreed that inter-agency training and the hire of the facility out to other fire and rescue services and emergency services would be seriously considered.

- 9.4 **RESOLVED to:**
- (i) **note the content of the report;**
 - (ii) **authorise release of expenditure up to a maximum of £250,000 from reserves to develop the next stage of a detailed business case for the option/s of a new training and development centre for the Service.**

10 BUDGET SETTING 2023-24

- 10.1 ACFO MacArthur delivered a presentation on Budget Setting which outlined the budget process, planning assumptions and timescales for setting the Fire and Rescue Authority's revenue budget for 2023/24.
- 10.2 It was noted that 15 January 2023 was the latest date that the budget could be submitted to local authorities. All local authority treasurers have recently been contacted about this draft budget.
- 10.3 It was highlighted that there had been a great deal of pressure on the 2022/23 budget due to the current economic situation. Pressure on the Fire Authority would result in an increased levy to the local authorities and Members would need to be accountable to their own local authority in order to explain this increase, which could be up to 15%. The possibility of a similar increase in the following financial year was also noted.
- 10.4 Members were given the opportunity to ask questions in relation to this report and one member felt that it was important that it be publicised that the increase in levy was not down to an overspend, what the public would be receiving for the extra spend and that the Authority would be using reserves in order to alleviate budget pressures for the current financial year.
- 10.5 The risk of £1.1m in relation to employer pension contributions for firefighters, previously financially supported by the Welsh Government and highlighted in paragraph 15 of the report, was raised and it was confirmed that the position has not yet been confirmed for 2023/24 onwards but that the Welsh Government would be clarifying this in due course. It was asked that it be noted that this could potentially be an additional cost pressure.
- 10.6 **RESOLVED to:**
- (i) note the planning assumptions being used to set the revenue budget for 2023/24; and**
 - (ii) note the proposal to provide initial budget estimates to the Executive Panel at its meeting of 12 December, and to seek approval for the 2023/24 revenue budget by the Authority at its meeting of 16 January 2023.**

11 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

- 11.1 ACO Morris presented the Annual Governance Statement and Members were asked to note that the draft of this report had already been before the Authority in June. The report presented the revised draft Annual Governance Statement 2021/22 to the Authority for approval.

- 11.2 It was noted that the changes made since the initial draft report had been issued were listed in Paragraph 12.
- 11.3 The External Auditor confirmed that they were happy with the amended statement.
- 11.4 **RESOLVED to:**
- (i) note the amendments made to the draft Annual Governance Statement 2021/22; and**
 - (ii) approve the revised draft Annual Government Statement 2021/22.**

12 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT

- 12.1 DCFO Forshaw presented the Annual Performance Assessment. This report assessed the performance of the Service during 2021/22 in relation to its progress towards achieving its long-term Improvement and Well-Being Objectives, and medium-term Equality Objectives, along with its compliance with applicable Welsh Language Standards.
- 12.2 It was noted that this report was very comprehensive and contained many excellent examples of good practice. It was also highlighted that a huge challenge for the Service was the availability of on-call firefighters.
- 12.3 Congratulations were given on the Service's achievements in regards to the promotion of the Welsh Language. It was asked that statistics be included in the future on the development of Members' Welsh language skills and the support offered to them.
- 12.4 **RESOLVED to:**
- (i) approve the draft assessment of the Authority's performance in 2021/22 (subject to minor additions and corrections if required) for publication on the Authority's website by 30/09/2022; and**
 - (ii) note the Service's intention to publish a simple summary version of the key elements of the assessment report.**

13 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2021-22

- 13.1 The Treasurer, Dafydd Edwards, presented to Members the audited Statement of Accounts for 2021/22. The report also presented the findings of the Auditor General for Wales which confirmed an unqualified audit opinion.
- 13.2 The Treasurer asked for his thanks to be given to ACFO MacArthur, Helen Howard, Head of Finance and representatives from Audit Wales for all of the work that had gone into these papers.

13.3 It was noted that paragraph 12 outlined the changes requested by Audit Wales.

13.4 **RESOLVED to:**

- (i) **note the audited outturn position and performance as detailed within the 2021/22 Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1);**
- (ii) **note the report of the Auditor General for Wales which confirms an unqualified audit opinion (Appendix 2);**
- (iii) **note the proposed letter of representation; and**
- (iv) **approve the final audited 2021/22 Statement of Accounts.**

14 COVID-19 INQUIRY PREPARATION

14.1 ACO Morris gave a presentation on the Covid-19 Inquiry Preparation paper which had been compiled in order to inform Members of work being undertaken by the Service to collate and archive evidence of the Service's preparations and response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was noted that this item was for information purposes.

14.2 **RESOLVED to note the information contained in the report.**

15 URGENT MATTERS

15.1 There were no urgent matters to discuss.

At the end of Part I of the agenda, Cllr. Rob Triggs left the meeting and it was then agreed to move into Part II of the meeting.

16 FIREFIGHTER PAY NEGOTIATION AND POTENTIAL INDUSTRIAL ACTION

16.1 The CFO presented the report which updated Members of the progress regarding national pay negotiations, the potential for industrial action and the business continuity arrangements being put in place.

16.2 Since the report had been written, a further unconditional pay offer of 5% had been made. The FBU had decided to ballot members as to whether to accept this, with the recommendation that it be rejected. Any industrial action may now take place in late December.

16.3 Members were asked to note that this was a fast-moving situation which would have significant implications for fire cover across North Wales. Members were assured that they will be regularly updated with regards to this situation.

16.4 RESOLVED to note the report.