

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 20 June 2016 at Denbighshire County Council Chamber, Ruthin. Meeting commenced at 10.50am.

PRESENT

Councillor

M LI Davies (Chair)
P R Lewis (Deputy Chair)
B Cowie
L W Davies
A I Dunbar
A Evans
J G Evans
M Holland
A M Jones
R O Jones
G Lowe
D A Macrae
H McGill
R E Parry
P Prendergast
W P Shotton
J R Skelland
A Tansley
W O Thomas
G G Williams

Representing

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

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); G Owens (Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer); R Simmons and R Fairhead (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); G W Griffiths (Training and Development Manager); G Brandrick (Senior Professional and Service Standards Manager); K Roberts (Senior Operations Manager); S Roberts (Head of Facilities); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer) and S Jones (Member Liaison Assistant).

APOLOGIES

Councillor

B Dunn
T A Edwards
C Hughes
W R Owen
D Taylor
J Vaughan
D Wisinger

Representing

Flintshire County Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Gwynedd Council
Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council

At the beginning of the meeting, the Chair paid tribute to Trystan Rhun Roberts who sadly passed away in May following a road traffic accident. Trystan was an apprentice mechanic in the Fleet Workshops at Llandudno Junction and was already showing great promise in his chosen career. The Chair and Deputy had attended the funeral service at Trystan's family home which was very ably supported by Service personnel in accordance with the wishes of Trystan's family. The Deputy Chair reiterated these words and commented that it had given him great pride to see the support provided by staff to the family and wished to put on record the Authority's appreciation to all those who had been involved in supporting the family at this difficult time. All those present observed a minute's silence as a mark of respect for a life lost tragically early.

Since the last meeting of the Authority, Cllr Richard Davies from Denbighshire County Council had sadly passed away. All those present observed a minute's silence in memory of Cllr Davies.

The Chair also paid tribute to the Member of Parliament, Jo Cox, who had been killed recently, whilst serving her community.

The Chair then informed Members that the Senior Training and Development Manager, Gareth Griffiths, will be retiring on 14 September. The Chief Fire Officer paid tribute to Mr Griffiths who had been a stalwart of NWFRS and its predecessor Gwynedd FRS for 30 years and wished him all the best for a long and prosperous retirement.

The Chair informed members that the community safety team had been successful in winning two categories in the All-Wales Continuous Improvement Community Awards 2016. The awards are designed to recognise and celebrate continuous improvement across public services in Wales and encourage the identification and sharing of best practice. The Service was presented with the two top awards at a ceremony in the Millennium Centre; one award in the category of 'Public Value' for an Integrated Home Safety Check and a second award in the category of 'Collaboration' for the work of the Tri Service Prevent and Respond Project Team.

The Chair welcomed new members, Councillors B Cowie, M Holland and P Prendergast to the meeting as well as members of the representative bodies.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 MARCH 2016

2.1 The minutes of the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 21 March were submitted for approval.

2.2 **RESOLVED to approve minutes of the meeting as a true and correct record.**

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 There were no matters arising.

4 URGENT MATTERS

4.1 There were no urgent matters.

5 CHAIR'S REPORT

5.1 The report listed meetings and events attended by Cllr M Ll Davies and Cllr P R Lewis in their roles of Chair and Deputy Chair of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority between March and June 2016.

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

6 DRAFT IMPROVEMENT AND WELLBEING OBJECTIVES 2017-18

6.1 The DCFO presented the report which informed members of the work of the Improvement Planning (IP) Working Group and to present the recommendations of the Executive Panel, of the 9 May 2016, with regard to the Authority's draft improvement objectives for 2017/18 and beyond. Members were reminded of the statutory duty to consult and set improvement objectives on an annual basis, and for the first time this year the Authority is also required to set objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015.

6.2 The CFO led Members through appendix A of the report which summarised the issues considered by the IP working group over four meetings. During the IP working group meetings members received presentations and information on NWFRA's medium term financial outlook, and considered a range of possible options for continuing to provide affordable fire and rescue services. Having considered the current improvement objectives it was recognised that NWFRA's existing improvement objective around a medium term financial plan in which freezing the budget is a central principle would not be sustainable. Consequently, members recognised that this financial strategy would need to be replaced by one that combines three aspects: using its financial reserves; increasing contributions from the constituent authorities in the region of £1.36million; and making service reductions which could amount to £900k. This new three-year strategy would see the Authority through to 2019/20, and would include maintaining a frozen budget in the last two of those three years.

6.3 The IP working group considered several options around service reductions in order to save the required £900k. Having considered these options in detail, the IP working group members concluded, with the greatest of reluctance, that removing the second wholetime appliance from Wrexham station would generate the savings required. This option would also mean the dis-establishment of 24 posts but given the anticipated turnover in the next 2-3 years, this reduction could be achieved without the need for redundancies. It was noted that removal of a wholetime appliance would leave the station with the same complement as both Rhyl and Deeside.

- 6.4 The CFO reminded members that this option would form part of the Authority's improvement plan consultation document and that there would be extensive consultation with the community in the coming months prior to the Authority being asked to approve the improvement plan document for 2017-18. Also, if approved, the removal of the second appliance from Wrexham would not be implemented until 2019/20.
- 6.5 Members recognised the issues facing the Authority but expressed serious concern about the removal of the second appliance from Wrexham. Issues of concern included: the growth in population; the large housing development planned for the area; the unknown impact of the new Berwyn prison to be opened in 2017 and the ongoing fire-related crime in the Wrexham area. Also, Cllr Skelland commented that the Wales Spatial Plan states that Wrexham is the hub of north east Wales and all development is funnelled towards Wrexham meaning that the town's industrial estates will be expanding and thousands more jobs created there. Members were also concerned about cross border working with Shropshire and Cheshire and due to the cuts being made in England whether there would be enough resource to provide the additional support potentially needed in the Wrexham. The CFO reassured Members that all those issues had been considered by the IP working group and that cross border working is enshrined in legislation. The increase in housing would not necessarily mean an increase in incidents and the Service has seen a significant reduction in incidents due to the success of the prevention work over the last 10 years; it was also noted that new builds are now fitted with a sprinkler system.
- 6.6 Members were also informed that the removal of the second appliance from Wrexham would require Wrexham and nearby stations Johnstown and Chirk to have a full complement and guaranteed number of RDS firefighters to sufficiently support the Wrexham wholetime duty system.
- 6.7 Cllr Lewis reassured members that the IP working group had spent over 12 hours considering all these issues and had not decided lightly to recommend this option for consultation; members had tried to be fair to the whole of North Wales and this option would provide the necessary savings without removing fire cover from any community. A blended approach will also negate the need to ask constituent authorities to significantly increase their contributions to the Authority.
- 6.8 Members discussed the issue at length and requested further information about the experience of other areas in having a prison in the vicinity and the CFO agreed to bring this information to a future meeting.
- 6.9 **RESOLVED to approve the four objectives listed below for public consultation prior to formal adoption by March 2017:**
1. To help to keep people and communities safe by preventing deaths and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation.
 2. (NEW) The Authority will adopt a three-year financial strategy that combines the use of reserves, an increase in financial contributions and service reductions.

3. The Authority will re-balance its resources to match risk. It will implement a new model of resourcing which ensures the availability of at least 20 strategically located fire crews in North Wales at times of relatively lower risk, and at least 38 at times of relatively higher risk.
4. The Authority will explore opportunities to diversify the role of the firefighter and offer additional services to the public of North Wales.

(The following Members abstained from the vote: Councillors A Evans, A M Jones and J R Skelland)

7 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE 2015-2016

- 7.1 The Interim Treasurer presented the report which provided members with a review of the financial performance of the Authority for 2015-16. The report had been considered in detail by members of the Audit Committee at its meeting on 6 June and they had no major observations or could find any major risks in the report and recommended that it be approved by the Authority.
- 7.2 Members were reminded that the Authority had agreed to fund some of the capital expenditure on short term assets through a contribution from revenue, in particular light vehicles and equipment for fleet, noting that the savings realised will be on debt repayment and borrowing costs. At the March 2016 Authority meeting, it had been agreed to use any underspend to fund the capital programme and this amounted to £641,158 for 2015-16.
- 7.3 Members once again reiterated their concerns about the reduction in community safety grant funding. Having had the opportunity to ask questions of the officers, Members **RESOLVED to note**

(i) **the previous decision to part-fund the capital programme from revenue increasing it from £534,048 to £641,158; and**

(ii) **the transfers between reserves and provisions as detailed below:**

Scheme	Opening Balance 01-Apr-15 £	Movement 2015/16	Closing Balance 31-Mar-16
Provisions			
Ill Health Pension Provision	(269,000)	169,000	(100,000)
Retained Back Pay Provision	(26,841)	26,841	
Retained Retrospective Pension Provision	(666,940)	666,940	
TOTAL PROVISIONS	(962,781)	862,781	(100,000)
Reserves			
General Reserve	(1,816,836)	(862,781)	(2,679,617)
Earmarked Reserves	624,506		(624,506)
Capital Reserve	(740,400)	340,400	(400,000)
TOTAL RESERVES	(3,181,742)	(522,381)	(3,704,123)

8 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY AND ACTUAL PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS FOR 2015-2016

8.1 The Interim Treasurer presented the annual treasury report which is a requirement of the Authority's reporting procedures. It details the treasury activity and the actual prudential indicators for 2015-2016 in accordance with the requirements of the Prudential Code.

8.2 The report had been considered in detail by members of the Audit Committee at its meeting on 6 June. Part of the presentation to Members included a discussion around the percentage of short term borrowing and the level of risk. Members were advised that if short term borrowing increased the change in the level of risk would be marginal but there would be financial savings. Members accepted the advice and agreed in principle to increase the level of short-term borrowing. The Audit Committee had no further observations nor could find any major risks in the report and recommended that it be approved by the Authority.

8.3 **RESOLVED to approve the actual 2015-2016 prudential indicators.**

At this juncture, Cllrs G Lowe and G Williams left the meeting.

9 2015-16 PROVISIONAL UNAUDITED PERFORMANCE KEY POINTS

9.1 The Corporate Planning Manager delivered a presentation on the provisional unaudited performance figures for 2015-16. This gave Members an early opportunity to see the Service's performance for the last financial year and it was noted that the information will be formally reported through the performance assessment which will be published by 31 October 2016.

9.2 The performance figures demonstrated that there continues to be a downward trend in the number of incidents across the majority of performance areas. However, there had been an increase in special service calls due to flooding incidents, a slight increase in the number of deliberate fires in dwellings and a slight increase in the number of casualties from accidental dwelling fires.

9.3 It was pleasing to note that there had been a significant reduction in the number of false alarm incidents attended down from 3218 to 1995; this sharp decrease in part could be attributed to the change in policy on attending automatic fire alarm calls which had reduced from 1972 to 966 in a year.

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

10 FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY BUDGET 2015-16 SUPPORTING PROJECTS

10.1 ACFO Fairhead presented the report which informed Members of the effects of the Authority's decisions to stop providing specialist rope rescue and large animal rescue services, and the revised arrangements for calls originating from automatic fire alarms (AFAs).

- 10.2 Members were pleased to note the positive outcomes of introducing the changes and thanked officers for their work in implementing the new policies. Cllr Lewis suggested that regular reports to the Authority were no longer needed unless there were any exceptional circumstances in future.
- 10.3 **RESOLVED to note the positive impact of the introduction of the new policies and that regular reports to the Authority were no longer required.**
- 11 ANNUAL REPORT OF BAD DEBTS WRITTEN OFF
- 11.1 At the request of the Authority, the Treasurer submits an annual report by the 30 June following the end of the financial year listing all the debts written off and stating the reasons for write off.
- 11.2 **RESOLVED to note that between 1 April 2015 and 31 March 2016, the Service wrote off three bad debts totalling £1,631.45.**

At this juncture, Cllrs R E Parry and A Tansley left the meeting.

- 12 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT
- 12.1 The DCFO presented the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) to Members; the Audit Committee members had considered the AGS in detail on 6 June and recommended that it be approved. It was noted that the AGS is a way of reporting publicly the extent to which an Authority complies with its own Code of Corporate Governance.
- 12.2 **RESOLVED to note the approve the content of the annual governance statement for 2015/16.**
- 13 FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEMES – BUY BACK OF MEMBERSHIP FOLLOWING INDUSTRIAL ACTION
- 13.1 The Chief Fire Officer presented the report which required Members to make a decision about the payment of employer superannuation contributions during the periods of strike action taken by operational employees.
- 13.2 Members were reminded of the strike action due to pension issues that was undertaken by firefighters over a period of twelve months, ranging from 25 September 2013 to 16 August 2014. Under the Firefighters' Pension Scheme any absence on strike will not count as pensionable service. A pension scheme member may, by giving written notice to the Authority within six months, 'buy back' the strike days, in order that they count as pensionable service. Where an active member is absent from scheme employment because of trade dispute, the scheme manager may require that the members should also pay the employer's contributions in addition to their own contribution.

13.3 It was noted that the Authority has the discretion, under rule F2 (5) of the FPS 1992 firefighters' pension scheme and under regulation 111 of the NFPS and 2015 firefighters' pension scheme, to elect to pay the employer's contributions in place of the member, should it wish to do so. This discretion is usually applied once the trade dispute has been finalised, however, as the Fire Brigade Union continues to contest the changes, the scheme manager has decided to complete the necessary action to ensure that scheme membership records are correct and up to date.

13.4 **RESOLVED to note the information and agree the Authority will cover the cost of the employer superannuation contributions for the periods in question.**

14 COMPLAINTS AND APPRECIATIONS

14.1 ACFO Simmons presented the report which informed Members of the number of complaints and letters of appreciation received from the public for the period 1 April 2015 to 31 March 2016.

14.2 Complaints are recorded as those issues brought to the attention of the Service when members of staff are participating in or carrying out the legitimate business of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service. It was noted that having investigated the 25 complaints received, 7 were upheld. In the same period 92 message of appreciation through letters, cards, e-mails, Twitter and Facebook messages were received expressing appreciation and satisfaction with the Service and its staff.

14.3 Members commended the very low percentage of complaints and the increase in messages of appreciation received by the Service.

14.4 **RESOLVED to note the number of complaints and expressions of appreciation received.**

15 MINUTES OF MEETINGS

15.1 The minutes of the following meetings were submitted for information:

- Executive Panel meeting held on 9 May 2016
- Audit Committee meeting held on 6 June 2016.

15.2 **RESOLVED to note the minutes for information.**

At this juncture, Cllrs P Shotton, A I Dunbar and W O Thomas left the meeting.

PART II - Pursuant to Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public were asked to leave the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business because it is likely that there would be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in Paragraph(s) 12 to 18 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

16 CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2016-17

16.1 The DCFO presented the report which updated Members on the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service's estate capital programme.

16.2 It was noted that the new fire and police stations at Nefyn, Tywyn and Deeside and the new fire and ambulance station at Wrexham are all now fully operational. The opening of these stations brings the Authority's capital programme for upgrading and modernising its estate to a close.

16.3 The DCFO thanked Stephen Roberts and his team in the Facilities Department for all their work on the programme over the last 10 years and these comments were reiterated by the Chair on behalf of the Authority. The CFO also commended the resolve of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority for maintaining this capital programme through to its completion in the face of competing budgetary pressures.

16.4 **RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.**