

**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**  
**AUDIT COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the **Audit Committee** of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 12 December 2022 virtually via Zoom. Meeting commenced at 09.30hrs.

**Councillor**

Nigel Smith (Chair)  
Mark Young (Deputy Chair)  
Bryan Apsley  
Marion Bateman  
Tina Claydon  
John Brynmor Hughes  
Marc Jones  
Gwynfor Owen  
Arwyn Herald Roberts  
Austin Roberts

**Representing**

Conwy County Borough Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Gwynedd Council (arrived 10:00)  
Conwy County Borough Council

**Also present:**

Dawn Docx  
Stewart Forshaw  
Helen MacArthur  
Dafydd Edwards  
Gareth Owens  
Helen Howard  
George Jones  
Lisa Allington  
Louisa Phillips  
Keith Williams

Chief Fire Officer  
Deputy Chief Fire Officer  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer  
Treasurer  
Clerk and Monitoring Officer  
Head of Finance and Procurement  
Atebol - Translator  
Executive Assistant  
M365 Change Manager  
Audit, Conwy County Borough Council

**1 APOLOGIES**

**Councillor**

Neil Coverley  
Adele Davies-Cooke  
Jeff Evans

**Representing**

Conwy County Borough Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Anglesey County Council

**ABSENT**

**Councillor**

Beverley Parry-Jones

**Representing**

Wrexham County Borough Council

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

2.1 There were no declarations of interest to record.

### **3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS**

3.1 There was no notice of urgent matters.

### **4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JULY 2022**

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2022 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to:**

**i) approve the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meetings held.**

### **5 MATTERS ARISING**

5.1 There were no matters arising.

### **6 CAPITAL STRATEGY AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT**

6.1 It was noted that a written report had been supplied for this meeting to provide Members with an update on the treasury management activity for 2022/23, and present to members the proposed Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy (the Strategies) incorporating the Minimum Revenue Statement for the period April 2023 – March 2024.

6.2 Members were asked to note that there were figures within this report that were consistent with Agenda Item 7, and so there would be some cross-over between the two items.

6.3 It was clarified that this item was not about endorsing the budget itself, but about recognising the prudential indicators which limited the Service's borrowings.

6.4 It was agreed that any decision on this item would be deferred to the Full Authority meeting in January, following ongoing discussions with Local Authority Leaders and the Welsh Government settlement which was due to take place on Wednesday 14 December.

6.5 **RESOLVED to:**

- i. note the mid-year position for the treasury management activities for 2022/23; and**
- II. note the Capital, Treasury Management and MRP Strategies for 2023/24;**

## **7. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023/26 AND BUDGET 2023/24**

- 7.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/26 and Budget 2023/24 report which presented to members the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/26 and the draft revenue and capital budgets for 2023/24. The report also set out the significant risks and uncertainties faced at this time.
- 7.2 It was clarified that Members were not being asked to approve the budget today, but merely to endorse it and recommend that it be approved at the Full Authority meeting on 16 January 2023.
- 7.3 The figures within the report were summarised for Members by way of a presentation on screen. Members were asked to note that many of the increases were beyond the Service's control due to the current financial climate, and that a number also related to the Service's priorities, which there was a legal obligation on it to fulfil.
- 7.4 It was agreed that a further meeting of the Audit Committee would be called prior to the Full Authority meeting in January in order to discuss this budget further.
- 7.5 **RESOLVED to:**
- (i) note the capital and revenue budgets for 2023/24 based on an increase in contributions from constituent authorities of £5.32m;**
  - (ii) note the key risks and uncertainties identified during the budget planning process;**
  - (iii) note the Medium-Term Financial Strategy; and**
  - (iv) note that the budget will require approval by the Fire and Rescue Authority at its meeting on 16 January 2023.**
  - (v) meet as an Audit Committee prior to the Full Authority meeting on 16 January 2023 in order to discuss the budget figures in more detail.**

## **8 AUDIT OF IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2022/23**

- 8.1 DCFO Forshaw presented the Audit of Improvement Plan 2022/23 report, which confirmed to Members the outcome of the external audit of the Authority's 2022/23 improvement measures, as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.
- 8.3 **RESOLVED to:**
- i. Note the audit letter confirming that the Authority has discharged its responsibilities under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.**

## **9 URGENT MATTERS**

9.1 There were no urgent matters to discuss.

At the end of Part I of the agenda, recording of the meeting ceased and it was agreed to move into Part II of the meeting.

## **10. INDUSTRIAL ACTION (VERBAL)**

- 10.1 The CFO gave a verbal 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.
- 10.2 A Part II paper had been previously presented to Members outlining the 2% pay offer to firefighters and control room staff, which had subsequently been rejected.
- 10.3 The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had recommended that their members rejected the subsequent increased offer of 5% with no conditions attached, which they had done, and a ballot for Industrial Action had been commenced with a closing date of the end of January 2023. Unfortunately, the FBU had not indicated what percentage they would accept and so there is no way of telling how far out the offer is.
- 10.4 It was noted that there were no rules in Wales with regards to percentage of votes required for Industrial Action as there was in England, and so the Service was expecting strike action to proceed.
- 10.5 Members were reminded that the Service was bound by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities with regards to the continued provision of services in the event of strike action. These requirements were summarised.
- 10.6 The Service was required to plan accordingly so that it could not be criticised for not maintaining provision of service during any period of strike action.
- 10.7 The possible courses of action available to FBU members were: action short of strike action which would mean that firefighters would refuse to undertake any overtime; discontinuous strike action for periods of three or four hours or whole shifts; or continuous strike action. All of these options were being planned for.

- 10.8 Those present were informed that a large number of officers, firefighters and members of the control room were in the FBU and would therefore be expected to comply with the result of the ballot. Any senior officers not taking part in the strike action would be undertaking refresher training early in the New Year. Plans were also being put in place for non-FBU members to be trained to work during periods of Industrial action.
- 10.9 The Service was looking at the best places geographically to place resilience appliances and which types of incident the Service would attend in the event of strike action. Small secondary and bin fires would likely not be attended whilst threat to life and road traffic collisions would. It was also being factored in to planning that February is the beginning of controlled burning season and so this could pose a potential issue.
- 10.10 Members may have heard that other Fire Services were advertising for resilience crew staff; however, having considered this the option had been discounted as it comes with a significant cost and provides little in terms of resilience due to the challenges of training them to do anything other than defensive firefighting outside of a building.
- 10.11 The Service has been in negotiation with the army for assistance but at the moment, have decided not to put in a Military Aid to Civil Authorities (MACA) request, again in part due to the cost which was around £4,000 per soldier per week, and because of the same concerns surrounding lack of time to deliver relevant training. However, even if the army were affordable there would be no guarantee that they would have the capacity to help.
- 10.12 It was queried as to why the army were not charging a marginal cost as they had on previous occasions and responded that as this was not a national emergency they would not do so. The possibility of asking the Welsh Government to use their influence to insist on marginal costs was being considered so that this could become a more feasible option.
- 10.12 Most importantly, the Service continued to work with local FBU officials in order to maintain a culture of mutual respect and cooperation. The Service also remained committed to updating the Fire Authority at every opportunity.

Meeting closed 11:05hrs