

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** held on **Monday 16 October 2023** virtually via **Zoom**. Meeting commenced at **09.30hrs**.

Councillor

Dylan Rees (Chair)
Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
Bryan Apsley
Marion Bateman
Carol Beard
Adele Davies-Cooke
Jeff Evans
Alan Hughes (left 11:29)
Chris Hughes
John Brynmor Hughes
Gareth R Jones
John Ifan Jones (left 12:05)
Marc Jones (left 11:46)
Gwynfor Owen
Arwyn Herald Roberts
Austin Roberts
Gareth A Roberts
Rondo Roberts (left at 10:50)
Paul Rogers
Gareth Sandilands
Dale Selvester
Rob Triggs
Mark Young

Representing

Anglesey County Council
Flintshire County Council (arrived 9:35)
Wrexham County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council
Anglesey County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Gwynedd Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Anglesey County Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Gwynedd Council
Gwynedd Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Gwynedd Council
Denbighshire County Council

Also present:

Dawn Docx
Stewart Forshaw
Helen MacArthur
Stuart Millington
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
Lisa Allington
Helen Howard
Tracey Williams
David Tomalin
Mike Whiteley
Euros Lake
Carwyn Rees

Chief Fire Officer (CFO)
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Treasurer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Executive Assistant
Head of Finance and Procurement
Head of Corporate Communications
Audit Wales
Audit Wales
Audit Wales
Audit Wales

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Tina Claydon
Sharon Doleman
Chrissy Gee
Beverley Parry-Jones
Michelle Walker

Representing

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

ABSENT

Councillor

Representing

The above apologies were offered and accepted.

A training session on Complaints was delivered to Members prior to the meeting's commencement.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Cllr Mark Young declared a personal interest in Item 15 – New Training Centre due to his membership on the Denbighshire Planning Committee.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

- 3.1 None.

4 MINUTES OF THE FRA AND AGM MEETINGS HELD ON 17 JULY 2023

- 4.1 The minutes of both the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) meeting and Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 17 July 2023 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **approve the FRA and AGM minutes as a true and correct record of the meetings held.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

- 5.1 Congratulations were offered to Cllr Mark Young who had taken over the role of Chair of the Audit Committee following Cllr Nigel Smith's resignation.
- 5.2 It was noted that Cllr Gwynfor Owens had assumed a position on the Local Pension Board and as Deputy Chair of the Audit Committee.

6 EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW CONSULTATION OUTCOMES

- 6.1 DCFO Forshaw presented the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) paper which aimed to provide Members with an update of the key emerging themes from the programme of consultation involving the public, staff and partner organisations on the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority)'s Emergency Cover Review which was conducted between 21 July 2023 and 30 September 2023.
- 6.2 A further presentation was given to Members by AM Anthony Jones giving a more detailed overview of the Emergency Cover Review consultation response.
- 6.3 Thanks were given to AM Anthony Jones and his team for the hard work that had been put into the consultation, which had been both a complicated and in-depth process.
- 6.4 One Member asked what input the Fire Brigades Union (the FBU) had put into the options released for consultation. DCFO Forshaw confirmed that the FBU had been involved in the pre-consultation process, and with the main process through the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee, and would be presenting their options to the Authority at the ECR Working Group meeting on 7 November 2023. The CFO further confirmed that FBU Representatives at both local and regional levels were involved in the process.
- 6.5 It was noted that two thirds of staff members within the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) had agreed with Option 1 and that overall, engagement with the consultation had been good.
- 6.6 One Member felt that there were links between this item and items 9, Audited Statement of Accounts and 10, Annual Performance Assessment and that these should be considered in conjunction with each other.
- 6.7 The Treasurer asked those present to note that Option 1 of the consultation, the option that the public had overwhelmingly given their support to, meant that there would need to be an increase in the levy to the local authorities. However, work remained ongoing through the Budget Scrutiny Members' Working Group in an effort to identify any savings that could potentially be made.

- 6.8 Following a request by a Member that the staff and other stakeholders be communicated with clearly following the outcome of this meeting, the CFO confirmed that the channels of communication had been open throughout the whole process, and remained so. Following each Authority meeting, the headlines of the meeting were issued on the same day to all staff. It would be ensured that Members were copied in on this communication today.
- 6.9 Concern was expressed by some around agreeing to ask Officers to cease work on options 2 and 3; however, it was also noted that Officers would require direction in order to continue. It would further put the minds of those staff members concerned about station closures at rest.
- 6.10 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Note, the comprehensive range of community and stakeholder engagement activities delivered as part of the public consultation;**
 - ii) **Note, the analysis of the consultation feedback in the report from independent consultant Sarah Barnett Research (Appendix 1;**
 - iii) **Note, additional comments and suggestions received for making improvements to the provision of fair and equitable emergency cover across North Wales.**
 - iv) **Note, the Member led Emergency Cover Review Working Group recommend that officers continue to work on variations of option 1 plus the points raised in the responses to the consultation; and**
 - v) **Agree, the recommendation from the Member ECR working group that the Authority cease working on options 2 and 3 from the ECR based on clear rejection from the public from within the consultation report.**

7 CHAIR'S REPORT

- 7.1 It was noted that a written paper 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 July 2023 and September 2023.
- 7.2 The CFO asked for her thanks to be noted to the Chair and Deputy Chair, as the workload caused by the consultation had been immense. Thanks also went to those other Members who had attended the public events.
- 7.3 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **note the information provided.**

8 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2022/23

- 8.1 DCFO Forshaw presented the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 paper to Members.
- 8.2 The Chair welcomed Mike Whiteley and David Tomalin from Audit Wales to the meeting, and they confirmed that the document had been reviewed by them and there had been no significant issues arising from their review.
- 8.3 Thanks were given to Officers for the professional presentation of the report.
- 8.4 **RESOLVED to:**
- ii) note the governance arrangements outlined within the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement;**
 - iii) note the forward work plan for 2023/24; and**
 - iv) approve the 2022/23 Annual Government Statement for publishing on the Authority's website by 31 October 2023.**

9 AUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2022/23

- 9.1 Dafydd Edwards, Treasurer, presented to Members the audited Statement of Accounts for 2022/23. This report also presented the findings of the Auditor General for Wales which confirmed an unqualified audit opinion.
- 9.2 The Audit Wales representatives noted that a significant amount of work had been put into this set of accounts by the finance team within the Service, and that it had been a really positive audit with a much lower occurrence of anomalies than in previous years.
- 9.3 A summary of the uncorrected misstatement referred to in paragraph 12 of the report was summarised by Audit Wales and it was clarified that the net worth of assets had been slightly overstated; however, this was a technical adjustment, had no real bearing on the accounts. They were therefore happy for it to remain uncorrected. It was confirmed that this would be taken into consideration in the following financial year when preparing the accounts.
- 9.4 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the audited outturn position and performance as detailed within the 2022/23 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 of the final audited 2022/23 Statement of Accounts.**

10 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT 2022/23

- 10.1 To present for Members' approval the annual assessment of the Authority's performance during 2022/23 in relation to its progress towards achieving its long-term Improvement and Well-Being Objectives, and medium-term Equality Objectives and its compliance with applicable Welsh Language Standards.
- 10.2 Officers were congratulated for their hard work with this report, and the excellent work carried out by the Service within education was noted.
- 10.3 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) approve the annual assessment of the Authority's performance in 2022/23 for publication on the Authority's website; and**
 - ii) note the Service's intention to publish a simple summary version of the key elements of the assessment report.**

11 FINANCIAL UPDATE 2023-24

- 11.1 ACFO MacArthur provided Members with an update on the revenue and capital expenditure forecast for 2023/24, as at 31 August 2023.
- 11.2 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the draft revenue and capital outturn projections for the 2023/24 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.**

12. BUDGET SETTING 2024/25

- 12.1 Dafydd Edwards, Authority Treasurer presented to Members a paper on the budget process, planning assumptions and timescales for setting the Authority revenue budget for 2024/25.
- 12.2 It was noted that the final preparation of the budget would be before Members on 22 January in preparation for the levy deadline of 15 February.
- 12.3 A breakdown of the Service's £6m deficit was given and it was noted that issues such as supply chain delays were now becoming business as usual. Members were asked to note that figures were indicative and the planning assumptions were being reviewed.

- 12.4 Members were advised that the Service had recently achieved its Cyber Essentials accreditation.
- 12.5 The Chair of the Budget Scrutiny Members' Working Group gave an overview of matters discussed at its inaugural meeting, and gave assurances that all budget lines would be appropriately scrutinised.
- 12.6 One Member highlighted that the predicted increase to the budget was around 13% and it was noted that this may change depending on the work of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and the final option decided upon with regards to the Emergency Cover Review.
- 12.7 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the planning assumptions being used to develop the revenue budget for 2024/25;**
 - ii) note the remit of the budget scrutiny working group established by the Audit Committee and the proposed reporting timetable;**
 - iii) note the proposal to provide initial budget estimates to the Executive Panel at its meeting of 18 December 2022; and**
 - iv) note the proposal to seek approval for the 2024/25 revenue budget by the Authority at its meeting of 22 January 2024.**

13. TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT APRIL – JUNE 2023/24

- 13.1 ACFO MacArthur presented to Members the Treasury Management Report. This report provided Members with an update on the treasury management activity, and compliance with the treasury management prudential indicators for the period 1 April 2023 – 30 June 2023.
- 13.2 An error to paragraph two was highlighted - the date that the Authority adopted the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Treasury Management in the Public Services: Code of Practice (2021) (the CIPFA Code) was December 2023.
- 13.3 Members were advised that this report had previously been scrutinised by the Audit Committee.
- 13.4 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) approve the treasury management activity; and**
 - ii) approve the prudential indicators for quarter 1 of 2023/24.**

14a FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME WALES – AGE DISCRIMINATION

14a.1 Cllr Rob Triggs, Cllr Paul Cunningham and Cllr Jeff Evans all declared a personal interest in this item as they were previous firefighters and members of the Firefighter's Pension Scheme. The Clerk noted that this did not preclude them from taking part in any decision-making process.

14a.2 ACFO MacArthur presented the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Wales – age discrimination report which aimed to provide an update to Members on the arrangements to address the age discrimination in the Firefighters' Pension Scheme in Wales.

14a.3 Members were asked to note that the Authority was the Scheme Manager for the Pension Schemes.

14a.4 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the legislative requirements and timescales established by the regulations; and**
- ii) note the work undertaken to implement the regulations.**

14b FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME WALES – PENSION ENTITLEMENT FOR RETAINED FIREFIGHTERS

14b.1 ACFO MacArthur provided an update to Members on the proposed amendments to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme in Wales to extend access for eligible retained (on-call) firefighters with pre-2000 service.

14b.2 The Chair noted that the FBU had provided good feedback on the work that had been carried out by the Service to date.

14b.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the background to the legal matter; and**
- ii) note the proposals set out by the Welsh Government to address the legal issues arising.**

15 NEW TRAINING CENTRE LAND PURCHASE

15.1 DCFO Forshaw presented the New Training Centre Land Purchase paper which provided Members with an update on the work undertaken to assess the suitability of identified land in St Asaph, Denbighshire, for the future development of a sustainable training and development centre in North Wales.

- 15.2 Concern was expressed at a potential lack of communication between the Service and the FBU, as the FBU had stated that they did not support the proposal for the build of a New Training Centre. DCFO Forshaw noted that some comparisons had been made to the Emergency Cover Review and the need for budget savings; however, these were two separate projects and must be treated as such. There had been clear dialogue regarding this project with the FBU and this would continue moving forward.
- 15.3 Members felt that the purchase of the land was an investment opportunity for the Service and noted that going ahead with the purchase did not mean that a decision would need to be made with regards to the build of the new Training Centre.
- 15.4 One Member enquired as to whether there had been any discussions with the other emergency services with regards to collaborative working and it was confirmed that initial discussions had taken place.
- 15.5 Some initial investigations into the possibility of grant funding was raised and the Welsh Government were currently looking at whether there was any capital funding available to help with this project. However, they supported the purchase of the land in the meantime.
- 15.7 A vote took place as to the resolutions, and it was noted that the resolutions were carried with a majority vote with two abstentions, Cllr Jeff Evans and Cllr Bryan Apsley.
- 15.7 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the background to review fire and rescue training facilities in North Wales;**
 - ii) note that the current training facility provision is reaching its end of life;**
 - iii) approve the purchase of land in St Asaph, Denbighshire, that has been assessed as being suitable for the construction of a new training and development centre in North Wales; and**
 - iv) approve commencement of newt mitigation work to ensure the site is ready for construction from December 2024. This would be subject to Member's scrutiny and approval;**

16 REVIEW INTO AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARMS

- 16.1 ACFO Millington presented the cover report on the review into automatic fire alarms which aimed to formally present to Members an overview of the findings following an audit of false fire alarms that was undertaken by Audit Wales.
- 16.2 Euros Lake and Carwyn Rees from Audit Wales were invited into the meeting to present the report.

16.3 Members were advised that the review had focused primarily on non-domestic automatic fire alarms and an overview of the report was given.

16.4 It was highlighted that the three recommendations made by Audit Wales had been accepted by Officers and had been built into the Annual Governance Statement.

16.5 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the content of the Audit Wales False Fire Alarms reduction report.**

17 URGENT MATTERS

17.1 There were no urgent matters to consider.

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 22 January 2024.

Meeting closed: 12:07