

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 16 September 2019 at Conwy County Borough Council Chamber, Bodlondeb, Conwy. Meeting commenced at 10.30am.

PRESENT

Councillor

Peter Lewis (Chair)
Dylan Rees (Deputy Chair)
Bryan Apsley
Marion Bateman
Brian Blakeley
Meirick Lloyd Davies
Ian Dunbar
Veronica Gay
Eric Wyn Jones
Sue Lloyd-Williams
Geoff Lowe
Roger Parry
Gareth A Roberts
Rondo Roberts
Paul Shotton
Nigel Smith
Adrian Tansley
Owen Thomas
Gethin Glyn Williams

Representing

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

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); C P Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); R Fairhead and K Roberts (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); H MacArthur and S Morris (Assistant Chief Officers); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); H Howard (Head of Finance); Ll Gutierrez-Jones (HR Manager); P Hardwick (Corporate Planning Manager); C A P Thomas and P Bass (Secretariat); M Georgiou (Monitoring Officer, Flintshire County Council).

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Michael Dixon
Ann Davies
John Brynmor Hughes
Richard Griffiths
David Wisinger

Representing

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

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 There were no urgent matters.

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JUNE 2019

4.1 The minutes of the FRA meeting held on 17 June 2019 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to approve the minutes as a true and correct record.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 Councillor Davies offered his congratulations and best wishes to the Chair and Deputy Chair in their new roles.

6 DRAFT ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (APA) 2018/19

6.1 ACO Morris presented the draft document to Members, prior to its publication on the Authority's website by 30 September 2019. The Authority has made good progress towards Improvement and Wellbeing, and Equality objectives, and has complied with all the Welsh language standards.

6.2 The Chair commended the report's author, Pippa Hardwick, on producing a first class document and suggested that all Members disseminate it to colleagues in their respective county councils.

6.3 Councillor Parry requested clarification on the Service's interface with Social Services (referring to the 'Bryn' Case Study in the APA). ACFO Roberts explained that the Service liaises with Social Services in respect of Safe and Well Checks for vulnerable individuals which now include highlighting other risks (eg slips, trips and falls) in addition to fire safety risks. Thereafter, the Service signposts individual/s to other partners such as Care and Repair, NHS, North Wales Police, WAST, and third sector volunteers. The Service's role is not to absorb the work of Social Services, rather to provide support for its prevention agenda.

- 6.4 Councillor Thomas expressed concern about an article in the press regarding fire alarm testing involving seven children, six of whom were undisturbed by the alarm, and the seventh child got up and proceeded to return to bed. ACFO Roberts clarified that this article relates to a previous study which followed 700 young children, where, on average, one in seven do not respond to the smoke detector alarms. It was explained that this is due to young children hearing and responding to lower frequencies and 'Voice Indication' systems which contrasts that of adults. From a safety perspective, the Service is not concerned as an escape plan is discussed and developed as part of all 'Safe and Well' checks, and where young children are part of the household, the need to evacuate them in response to operating smoke alarms is included. There should always be a responsible adult present.
- 6.5 Councillor Thomas enquired as to whether there are measures in place to overcome the technological issue. ACFO Roberts advised that smoke detector technology (including single point protector) is constantly evolving and that the Authority's supply chain contracts are being revised and updated accordingly with advances in new technology.
- 6.6 Councillor Lowe advised Members that he had also read the press article and suggested being mindful of the amount of technology and numerous devices that young people contend with. Councillor Lowe also thanked the service for its response to the fire at Village Bakery on the Wrexham Industrial Estate.
- 6.7 Councillor Shotton expressed concern about the removal of funding for the Community Assistance Team (CAT), especially in light of an elderly resident who fell and had to call out an ambulance which could otherwise have been used for something more serious. The CFO advised that, despite the clear implications for constituents and the knock-on effects for the ambulance service, and having made the case to Welsh Government (WG), there is little appetite within WG for the Service to fulfil this role. However, there is still a possibility that it will become part of the firefighters' role map (with reference to pay negotiations), albeit in a different way to the pilot scheme in North Wales. However, it is unlikely that funding will be reinstated.
- 6.8 Councillor Lowe thanked the CFO for pursuing the CAT issue on behalf of Members.
- 6.9 Councillor Davies thanked ACO Morris for the comprehensive document, including its informative glossary.
- 6.10 RESOLVED to approve the document for publication on the Authority's website.**

7 FINAL AUDITED 2018/19 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS AND PROVISIONAL
OUTTURN 2019/20

- 7.1 The Treasurer confirmed the approval of the final audited 2018/19 Statement of Accounts by the Executive Panel on 29 July 2019. The review of the capital expenditure budget for 2019/20 been completed, freeing up resources against other demands.
- 7.2 The CFO added that the revenue budget projections have been aided by the decrease in expenditure in comparison with summer of 2018. However, there may be implications associated with a poor winter and severe flooding events.
- 7.3 The Chair thanked the officers for submitting the accounts on time given the earlier date for financial reporting that had been introduced from this year.
- 7.4 **RESOLVED to note the approval of the final audited 2018/19 Statement of Accounts.**

8 TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS 2019/20

- 8.1 The Treasurer introduced the report and confirmed that it had been reviewed by the Audit Committee prior to this meeting. The Treasurer expressed his gratitude to Members for adapting to the change of timetable and for combining both the Audit Committee meeting and the full Authority meeting on the same day.
- 8.2 Councillor Lloyd-Williams commended S Forrest for producing a clear report.
- 8.3 **RESOLVED to approve the report as per the Audit Committee's recommendation.**

9 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME DISCRETIONARY POLICY

- 9.1 ACO MacArthur outlined the discretionary elements of the LGPS and how the policy will provide consistency, although the rules governing discretions are largely prescribed.
- 9.2 The 18 discretions are diverse, however, they can be grouped together according to their nature, as in Appendix 1.
- 9.3 ACO MacArthur outlined each discretion and the implications of accepting each one as part of the policy.

At this juncture Councillor Lowe left the Chamber.

9.4 Councillor Davies enquired as to what the response has been to the proposals from the unions. ACO MacArthur clarified that as the discretions are largely standard within the public sector, no consultation has been sought.

9.5 **RESOLVED to approve the resolutions applicable to each discretionary element as outlined within Appendix 1, to be incorporated into the Service's LGPS Discretionary Policy.**

10 PRINCIPAL OFFICERS' PAY AWARD 2019

10.1 The negotiating bodies have reached the following agreements for 2019:

- i. The NJC has agreed an increase of 2% applicable from 1 January 2019. This agreement applies to the Chief Fire Officer and the Assistant Chief Fire Officers.
- ii. During July 2018, the JNC confirmed a two year approach for the periods commencing 1 April 2018 and 1 April 2019. This included a 2% award from 1 April 2019. This agreement applies to the Assistant Chief Officers and the Treasurer.

10.2 **RESOLVED to note and implement the arrangements above.**

11 UPDATE FROM THE INCLUSIVE FIRE SERVICE GROUP

11.1 Councillor Lloyd-Williams expressed her pleasure at being able to chair the group, and formally offered her thanks to members of the group for their commitment.

At this juncture Councillor Lowe returned to the Chamber.

11.2 Good progress has been made over the last 12 months in regards to strategies, and the group is now more diverse, including an RDS firefighter and a female apprentice. A work programme (Appendix 1) has been formulated to focus on the long term strategies.

11.3 The Chair thanked Councillor Lloyd-Williams for the report.

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

12 GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE ARRANGEMENTS FOR FRAs IN WALES

- 12.1 The CFO updated Members on the latest progress with regards to WG proposals to change governance and finance arrangements. The CFO reminded Members that responses to the consultation paper were provided by WG on 18 July 2019, with 59 of the 60 being published.
- 12.2 The Deputy Minister met with CFOs and Chairs in June and following that issued a progress report on the White Paper as part of a more general paper on the national framework. Two proposals will not be taken forward (as outlined in paragraph 12) and WG have indicated that they will still take forward some of the proposed changes such as performance management, making FRAs precepting, and reducing the number of members on FRAs.
- 12.3 The Clerk advised Members that the legislative capacity of the Welsh Assembly is limited and therefore the timescale may slip into 2020. The CFO confirmed that precepting would be unlikely to be introduced within the current government's lifetime.
- 12.4 Councillor Davies asked if the Minister is planning on visiting the Authority, to which the CFO confirmed a date of mid-October.
- 12.5 Members were pleased to note that two proposals have not been taken forward.

12.6 RESOLVED to note the contents of the update.

13 PREPARATION FOR THE UK'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION (BREXIT)

- 13.1 ACFO Fairhead outlined the Authority's preparations for fleet and IT supply chains, and staff who may be affected by their/their family's EU nationality.
- 13.2 The Authority has been involved in the Local Resilience Forum with other partners to consider contingencies for the worst case scenario and in an effort to mitigate risks. Reports were being provided to Welsh Government on a weekly basis until 17 October 2019, and this would increase to a daily basis thereafter.

13.3 Councillor Shotton expressed concern about the recent Operation Yellowhammer report, especially with regards to medical supplies and food shortages and asked how prepared the Authority is. ACFO Fairhead confirmed that the worst case scenario is being planned for, however the Chair added that some of the issues are out of the Authority's scope.

13.4 Councillor Davies offered his thanks to ACFO Fairhead for his excellent work on this issue.

13.5 Councillor Roberts expressed concerns around funding and expenses and asked if there is any way to recoup any funding for Brexit. ACFO Fairhead explained that the Authority is planning for Brexit as part of its internal business continuity management and that the Local Resilience Forum has received some funding from WG.

13.6 RESOLVED to note the contents of the report.

14 NATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON FIREFIGHTERS' PAY (VERBAL)

14.1 The CFO updated Members that as part of the negotiations, it had been arranged for CFOs and Chairs to meet with the employer representatives of the NJC to provide input on 17 July 2019 in Manchester. Following that meeting, the NJC has provided both employers and employees with a Circular advising that a further period of consultation has now taken place and the offer of a 2% pay award for 2019 was made to the employees in July, which the FBU has accepted.

14.2 Discussions around broadening the role and the associated increase in remuneration have been paused. The NJC has, however, stated that "both sides are still committed to the principles of broadening the role".

14.3 RESOLVED to note the update.

15 URGENT MATTERS

15.1 There were no urgent matters.

PART II

16 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS TO THE AUTHORITY'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE

16.1 Following the vacancy on the Standards Committee for one Independent Member, and the Independent Member who chairs the Committee retiring next summer, two very good applicants were considered. Following discussions it was:

16.2 RESOLVED to accept that:

- (i) Gareth Pritchard be appointed to the vacant position for four years (until September 2023);**
- (ii) an additional fifth Independent Member position be created on the Standards Committee until the compulsory retirement of the current Chair of the Committee, whereon it will revert to four Independent Members;**
- (iii) Gill Murgatroyd be appointed to the Committee;**
- (iv) a letter of thanks be sent to Noela Jones for her assistance in the recruitment process.**