

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
EXECUTIVE PANEL

Minutes of the **Executive Panel** of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 16 June 2025, virtually via Zoom. Meeting commenced at 14.00hrs.

Councillor

Cllr Dylan Rees (Chair)
Cllr Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
Cllr Carol Beard
Cllr Chris Hughes
Cllr John Ifan Jones
Cllr Paul Rogers
Cllr Gareth Sandilands
Cllr Dale Selvester
Cllr Antony Wren

Representing

Ynys Môn County Council
Flintshire County Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Anglesey County Council
Wrexham County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council

Also present:

Dawn Docx
Helen MacArthur
Justin Evans
Anthony Jones
Mike Plant

Llinos Evans
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
Dan Stephens
Marian Lloyd Rees
Lisa Allington

Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Area Manager - Performance, Planning
and Transformation
Head of Corporate Communications
Treasurer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser for Wales
Atebol - Translator
Executive Assistant

1.0 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Cllr Alan Hughes
Cllr Rondo Roberts

Representing

Denbighshire County Council
Wrexham County Council

ABSENT

Councillor

Cllr Gareth A Roberts

Representing

Gwynedd County Council

2.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3.0 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 CFO Docx submitted a notice to discuss the appointment of the Assistant Chief Fire Officer posts which would be a Part II item.

4.0 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 MARCH 2025

- 4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2025 were submitted for approval. A proposal was made that they were a true and accurate record of proceedings. This was seconded and passed with all in favour.

4.2 RESOLVED to:

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

5.0 MATTERS ARISING

- 5.1 Feedback was requested in relation to paragraph 6.8, item 3, whereby Members had stated that they would seek financial assistance from the Welsh Government (WG) in relation to the Independent Culture Review.
- 5.2 CFO Docx confirmed that North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) were working closely with WG on cultural improvement, and that WG had funded Grievance and Discipline training which had recently been delivered to the Service Leadership Team (SLT), Human Resources (HR) and Middle Leaders. The session had resulted in confirmation that the policies the Service had been using met all best practice standards which was very positive. It had been a very useful session that all concerned had benefitted from. The Service continued to work with WG in relation to additional assistance.

6.0 INDEPENDENT CULTURAL REVIEW INTO NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

- 6.1 The CFO advised that, in addition to the Strategic Improvement Plan, the Cultural Improvement Board had already commenced, and its membership included the Chair of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) and Cllr Sharon Doleman as the Member Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Champion, along with representatives from the Welsh Government. The WG were working with the Service to recruit an external person to also sit on the Cultural Board in order to provide independent challenge.
- 6.2 AM Mike Plant presented the update on the Independent Cultural Review into the Service and confirmed the next steps on the cultural journey of the Service.

- 6.3 A Member highlighted the challenges of building trust within the Service, asked if any external providers would be involved in this improvement journey, and if there were any accreditations that could be achieved as a result. The CFO confirmed that some work with external providers had taken place in the past and negotiations were in place for an independent person to sit on the Cultural Board. The Unions were also involved in every possible aspect of this cultural journey.

6.4 RESOLVED to:

- i) **Note the Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan, and**
- ii) **endorse the next steps on the cultural journey of NWFRS.**

7.0 CHIEF FIRE AND RESCUE ADVISOR AND INSPECTOR FOR WALES - INSPECTION REPORT

- 7.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented to Members the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor and Inspector for Wales (CFRAIW)'s Inspection Report entitled 'Inspection of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service to consider the effectiveness of its response to domestic dwelling fires'.
- 7.2 It was noted that the CFRAIW, Dan Stephens, had previously completed thematic inspections of operational effectiveness of South Wales and Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Services in 2024, and published inspection reports in October 2024 and January 2025 respectively.
- 7.3 Dan Stephens was welcomed to the meeting and highlighted to Members that the inspection report was extensive and in parts, quite technical. The substantive issues had therefore been captured in the executive summary. The purpose of the inspection had been to establish how effective the Service was in its response to domestic dwelling fires and this incident type had been selected as it represented the highest volume life risk incident to which the Service responds and presented the greatest risk to firefighters, trapped occupants and their homes.
- 7.4 Members were briefed on the methodology behind the report, and noted that the findings were broadly similar to those of South Wales and Mid and West Wales.
- 7.5 Mr. Stephens advised that, had a graded judgement of performance been made using the HMICFRS grades applied in England, albeit not using an identical methodology, the performance of all three FRS's would have been assessed as inadequate. The underlying reason for this was that much of the of the structural firefighting training delivered by the Service reflected tactics partially introduced in the late 1990s, several of which were not scientifically proven at the time or designed for use within the UK.

- 7.6 This situation had been compounded in North Wales by the withdrawal of legacy Service Operational Policy and Procedure Orders and their replacement with Aide Memoirs as a precursor to the full implementation of National Operational Guidance. This had been done for the right reasons, but the Service faced some significant resourcing challenges particularly with Supervisory and Middle Manager roles in functional areas, making it very difficult to keep pace with the demands of risk critical issues such as the implementation of National Operational Guidance.
- 7.7 Mr. Stephens noted that a substantial and sustained increase in training would be required for firefighters, but that this could not be at the expense of risk reduction activity such as home safety visits. He had written to the Cabinet Secretary setting out his concerns in that regard.
- 7.8 In conclusion, the CFRAIW stressed that the observations made in his report were not intended to be, and should not be taken as, a criticism of the Service's firefighters, Officers or their training instructors. The levels of engagement with all staff throughout the inspection had been excellent and all involved had been very receptive to the adoption of evidence-based tactics and enhancements to the operational assurance process.
- 7.9 A Member asked if the Service was confident that the recommendations could be met within the stipulated timeframe, and ACFO Jones responded that work in this area had already commenced; however, availability of resources was a significant challenge and posed a real concern.
- 7.10 A Member wondered if the Fire Service College being privatised had contributed to the issues highlighted, and Mr. Stephens responded that whilst it had not helped, ultimately it was within the gift of the three Welsh fire and rescue services to collaborate and develop both policy and training. It was fundamental that the right training facilities be made available to do this and this should be progressed as a priority, and Mr. Stephens commended CFO Docx for her commitment to provide a first-class training facility for North Wales. He urged Members to fully support the CFO in her ambition to deliver the most effective structural firefighting training facilities in the UK.
- 7.11 It was asked if the CFRAIW was happy with the timescale for the development of the training centre, and whether he was able to become involved himself in its development. Mr. Stephens responded that in terms of the fast-time actions, steps were being taken to address those, such as developing policy, which was both necessary and positive. Assistance had been provided in that regard and would continue to be. He recognised that any capital project took a substantial investment in time, resources and money and could not happen quickly, although he had no doubt that the Training Centre would be delivered. Any financial support by way of capital that the WG could make available to the Authority, and there was a very strong case for the Authority to have that training centre, would be fully supported by the CFRAIW.

7.12 The Chair asked if he had understood correctly that the resources required by the Service were around middle management and the CFRAIW confirmed that it was. The number of established Station and Group Manager roles in the Service was driven by the minimum numbers necessary to populate the operational cover rota. This was not the same as the numbers required to meet the organisational workload. Whilst resourcing was outside the scope of the inspection, the limited managerial resource available to the CFO was undoubtedly a challenge. That said, there was clearly a limit to the amount of funding that could be levied to the local authorities.

7.13 The CFO thanked Mr. Stephens for his in-depth work in this area. Having him conduct an independent review had been extremely helpful and was a clear statement that although hard work and willingness to deliver within the Service was second to none, what was possible to achieve within the timescale provided was a challenge.

7.14 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the content of the report; and**
- ii) note that the action plan has been put in place to consider the recommendations of the CFRAIW's inspection.**

8.0 PERFORMANCE MONITORING, APRIL 2024 – MARCH 2025

8.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented the Performance Monitoring Report for April 2024 to March 2025. Members were advised that this report provided comparative data relating to the Authority's 'Our 5 Principles for keeping communities safe' for the 2024/25 financial year. The report also contains commentary on activity and proposed activity associated with the principles.

8.2 The detail contained within the report in relation to sickness absence and automatic fire alarms was highlighted.

8.3 Members felt that overall, the prevention work being carried out was positive; however, the Chair noted that the HMICFRS had recently highlighted an issue in Devon and Somerset Fire and Rescue Service where there had been a backlog of 7000 home safety visits. One of those people waiting for a visit had subsequently died in a fire. He noted that the Performance Monitoring Report stated that the completion rate for high priority safe and well checks had declined due to a combination of operational and strategic factors. He asked what the percentage for carrying out safe and well checks within target was for the Service.

- 8.4 ACFO Jones responded that many vulnerable people were referred from partner agencies and these referrals were then assessed and prioritised based on those most in need of support. A significant increase in the number of agency referrals had been experienced by the Service in 2024 resulting in a backlog of high priority referrals which posed a risk both to the individual concerned and the Service. Steps had been taken to deal with this backlog, and to improve the quality and appropriateness of referrals which had in turn fostered stronger relationships with partner agencies.
- 8.5 ACFO Jones confirmed that the exact data in terms of percentages was not to hand, however a performance dashboard had been developed to prioritise safe and well checks for the most vulnerable, and the need to improve response times to carry out checks for those at most risk was a priority for 2025-26 in relation to prevention activities.
- 8.6 The Chair requested that month by month percentage data be included within future reports so that this area could be more closely monitored by Members.
- 8.7 A Member asked if preventative measures in relation to educational activity were targeted around antisocial behaviour, and how the data within the report compared UK-wide. ACFO Jones responded that, in relation to engagement with young people, an intensive programme of targeted school visits was carried out alongside the delivery of Phoenix programmes, targeted to work in collaboration with schools to help some of the more challenging young people. Fire safe sessions were also delivered through Dangerpoint and were specifically designed to work with young people who were demonstrating early indications of fire setting activities.
- 8.8 Thanks were given to the CFO, ACFO Jones and other representatives from the Service for their attendance at the Prestatyn Pride event held last weekend.
- 8.9 A Member praised the work of the Phoenix course and felt that they should be commended for the exemplary work carried out by them. It was also asked if there were any plans to extend the cadet scheme. ACFO Jones responded that the cadet programmes were a valuable part of youth experience and there had been many occasions where these youngsters had gone on to work for the fire service. However, the cadet courses were run by volunteers and so there were challenges in finding people able to commit to the time required to run a cadet course.

- 8.10 Members were pleased to note that the numbers of RDS availability appeared to have increased slightly during the day. However, there remained one RDS station that had been off the run for over 12-months, and it was asked what could be done to rectify this. ACFO Jones responded that the response team had reorganised their structure to help focus on those areas of most challenge which had resulted in an incremental increase in weekday availability. The challenge was that once a firefighter left, it took a couple of years to replace them with someone trained to a similar level of skill and competency. This was a national issue for on-call services, and recruitment and retention were a constant challenge that was being worked on continually.
- 8.11 The Treasurer noted the increase in false alarm incidents and wondered if there were plans in place to address this further. He also noted that wildfires were at their highest level. ACFO Jones responded that there was often an increase in wildfires when the weather had been particularly dry during the controlled burning season. However, the Service's ability to respond had been positive. In relation to false alarms, the Service was seeing the biggest increase in relation to domestic dwellings and partnership working was being targeted to mitigate the response challenge that this created.

8.12 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the content of the Performance Monitoring Report; and**
- ii) Request that data be included in future reports on how many high priority safe and well checks are being completed within the 28-day target.**

9.0 STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 ACFO Anthony Jones delivered the Strategic Risk Management paper which provided Members with an update in relation to the Risk Appetite Statement and an overview of the Authority's Strategic Risk Register.
- 9.2 It was asked if the risks highlighted in the CFRAIW report needed to be included within the Risk Register, and ACFO Jones responded that they were already included within the Departmental Risk Registers rather than being strategic risks.

9.3 RESOLVED to:

- i) note the Strategic Risk Register.**

10.0 URGENT MATTERS – PART II

- 10.1 As notified at the commencement of the meeting, a Part II item was put forward for discussion by the CFO in relation to the recruitment of two ACFO posts to the Service.

- 10.2 Members were advised that the Service had recently advertised two ACFO posts, both locally and nationally, and a number of applications had been received both internally and externally which was pleasing as it meant that the Service remained an attractive place to work. Longlist interviews were being undertaken on 17 June 2025, with shortlist interviews to be held on 27 June 2025.
- 10.3 The CFO advised that panel members were required for the shortlist interviews and that these had to be Members from the Executive Panel. Representatives from Anglesey, Flintshire and Conwy had already been secured, but representatives from Wrexham, Gwynedd and Denbighshire were still required. If any Members from these local authorities were available on 27 June 2025, and were able to attend Headquarters in person, they were asked to advise Members Services at the earliest. It was stressed how important these appointments were for the Service and that there was a need to make the right choices.
- 10.4 A Member asked if there was a process in place for checking the social media accounts for candidates, and the CFO responded that whilst references were always taken up, social media had not been checked in the past. However, it was recognised that these were high profile posts and that people needed to have confidence in their leaders so the legalities of looking into it on this occasion would be explored.
- 10.5 A Member asked how involved the Unions would be in the process, and the CFO responded that the media assessment and psychometric testing was in place and that she would work out how the views of employees could be represented.

Meeting closed: 15:35 hrs