

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY AUDIT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 29 July 2022 via Zoom.

PRESENT

Councillors:

J M Evans	Anglesey County Council
A Roberts	Conwy County Borough Council
N Smith	Conwy County Borough Council
B Blakeley	Denbighshire County Council
M Young	Denbighshire County Council
M Bateman	Flintshire County Council
T Claydon	Flintshire County Council
A Davies-Cooke	Flintshire County Council
J B Hughes	Gwynedd Council
G Owen	Gwynedd Council
A Herald Roberts	Gwynedd Council
B Apsley	Wrexham County Borough Council
M Jones	Wrexham County Borough Council
B Parry-Jones	Wrexham County Borough Council

ALSO PRESENT:

D Docx (Chief Fire Officer); D Edwards (Treasurer); M Georgiou (Deputy Monitoring Officer); H MacArthur (Assistant Chief Fire Officer); S Morris (Assistant Chief Officer); K V Williams (Audit Department, Conwy County Borough Council); H Howard (Head of Finance); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer).

1 APOLOGIES

Cllr N Coverley	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr A Roberts	Conwy County Borough Council

2 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR

- 2.1 The Deputy Clerk requested nominations for the office of Audit Committee Chair for the 2022/23 municipal year.
- 2.2 Cllr J B Hughes nominated Cllr N Smith and this was seconded by Cllr B Blakeley.
- 2.3 Cllr A Herald Roberts proposed Cllr G Owen and this was seconded by Cllr G Owen.

2.4 Having put these names to the vote, Cllr N Smith received the most votes and it was therefore **RESOLVED that Cllr Nigel Smith be elected as Chair of the Audit Committee for the 2022/23 municipal year.**

2.5 The Chair then requested nominations for the office of Audit Committee Deputy Chair for the 2022/23 municipal year.

2.6 Cllr J M Evans nominated Cllr M Young and this was seconded by Cllr B Blakeley.

2.7 No other names were put forward and it was therefore **RESOLVED that Cllr Mark Young be elected as Deputy Chair of the Audit Committee for the 2022/23 municipal year.**

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

3.1 None.

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 JANUARY 2022

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 24 January 2022 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the last meeting as a correct record.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 There were no matters arising.

6 BROADENING THE ROLE OF THE FIREFIGHTER IN WALES - FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE CAPACITY – THEMATIC REVIEW

6.1 The Chief Fire Officer presented the report which provided an overview of the Thematic Review of the Fire and Rescue Services' capacity to assume a broader role for firefighters in Wales. This was produced by the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor to Welsh Government, Dan Stephens, and published on 5 December 2021.

6.2 Members were informed that in March 2021, the Deputy Minister for Social Partnership and the then Minister for Health and Social Services, informed the Senedd of plans to develop a broader role for firefighters in Wales, in support of the NHS in Wales. Thereafter the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor and Inspector for Wales undertook a thematic review to provide assurance that the three Welsh FRSs had the capacity to carry out any additional work arising from broadening of the firefighters' role without detriment to core services. The outcome of the review was published in December 2021.

- 6.3 In the following six months there has been on-going dialogue between the Chief Fire Officers in Wales and Welsh Government Officials. On 8 July 2022 the Deputy Minister wrote to the Chairs of the Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales to ask for written confirmation, by 31 August 2022, as to whether they accept the review's findings and how they intend to progress the recommendations. These recommendations related to reviewing existing shift systems, analysing station work routines and also consideration of increasing capacity within the mobilising system.
- 6.4 The Treasurer commented that as the Authority faces a period of transition and taking into consideration that inflation is at its highest level for many years, Members will need to have detailed discussions in order to manage the Authority's budget carefully and equitably to ensure that any changes remain affordable for the future.
- 6.5 Members were of the view that any broadening of the firefighter role could only be allowed as long as it did not cause detriment to the core services that need to be delivered by firefighters.
- 6.6 In terms of reviewing shift patterns, Members noted that this proposal will be undertaken as part of the forthcoming Fire Cover Review. Members also highlighted the importance of engaging with employees and the representative bodies and having frank and open communication with them about potential changes.
- 6.8 **RESOLVED to note:**
- (i) the publication of "Broadening of the role of firefighters in Wales. 2021 Thematic Review report by the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor and Inspector for Wales"**
 - (ii) the subsequent correspondence from the Deputy Minister to the Chair of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and authorise that a response should be written from the Chair, in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer, reflecting Members' views and sent to the Deputy Minister by 31 August 2022.**

7 INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER AND ANNUAL PLAN 2022/23

- 7.1 Keith Williams presented the report which set out the internal audit charter and annual plan for 2022/23.
- 7.2 Mr Williams explained to Members that the overall strategy of Internal Audit is to deliver a risk based audit plan in a professional, independent manner, in compliance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The Charter identifies how the Internal Audit Service will assist the Authority to accomplish its objectives by bringing a systematic,

disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

7.3 Mr Williams confirmed that the audit plan for 2022/23 focussed on the core financial systems of payroll, creditors and stores following the implementation of the new financial system by the Authority during April 2022.

7.4 **RESOLVED to approve the Internal Audit Charter and Annual Plan 2022/23.**

8 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY AND ACTUAL PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS FOR 2021/2022

8.1 The report provided information on the treasury management activity and prudential indicators for North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority during the 2021/22 financial year. This report is a requirement of the Prudential Code.

8.2 Members were informed that the Authority's treasury management activities are regulated by professional codes, statutes and guidance. The borrowing position at 31 March 2022 was £24.4m which is within the limit approved by Members. The value of short term loans was £13.6m which is within the limit set within the strategy. No variable rate loans were held during the financial year.

8.3 In response to a Member's question, it was confirmed that all short term loans mature within 12 months.

8.4 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) note the treasury management activity; and**
- (ii) approve the final prudential indicators for 2021/22.**