

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** held on **Monday 21 July 2025** virtually via **Zoom**. Meeting commenced at **09.53**.

Councillor

Dylan Rees (Chair)
Mark Young (Deputy Chair)
Bryan Apsley
Tina Claydon
Paul Cunningham
Ann Davies
Sharon Doleman
Jeff Evans (arrived 10:53)
Ian Hodge
Alan Hughes
John Brynmor Hughes
John Ifan Jones
Marc Jones
Gwynfor Owen
Arwyn Herald Roberts (left 11:09)
Austin Roberts
Gareth A Roberts
Rondo Roberts
Gareth Sandilands
Dale Selvester (left 10:12)
Antony Wren

Representing

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

Also present:

Dawn Docx
Helen MacArthur
Justin Evans
Anthony Jones
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
Steve Morris
Llinos Evans
Heledd Davies
Lisa Allington

Chief Fire Officer (CFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Treasurer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Head of ICT
Head of Corporate Communications
Atebol Translation Services
Members' Services

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Carol Beard
Chrissy Gee
Chris Hughes
Thomas Montgomery
Beverley Parry-Jones
Paul Rogers

Representing

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

ABSENT

Councillor

Representing

The above apologies were offered and accepted.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest to record.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 No notices of urgent matters had been received.

4 MINUTES OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 28 APRIL 2025

4.1 The minutes of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) meeting held on 28 April 2025 were submitted for approval.

4.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) approve the FRA minutes from 28 April 2025 as a true and correct record of the meeting held.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 There were no matters arising.

6 CHAIR'S REPORT

6.1 It was noted that a written paper had been provided to Members to inform them on the meetings and events attended by the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority in their official capacities between April and June 2025.

6.2 A Member commented on the high standard of applications received for the ACFO post, and how pleasing it was that there had been a high proportion of internal applicants.

6.3 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the information provided within the paper.**

7 INDEPENDENT CULTURAL REVIEW UPDATE

7.1 CFO Docx presented the Independent Cultural Review Update which presented to Members the draft Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan (SCIP) for approval and provide an update on progress to date on the cultural journey of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service).

7.2 Key areas of the paper were highlighted and a Member asked how it would be independently verified that the culture changes would be embedded. The CFO responded that whilst this was an area that was difficult to measure, work was taking place in liaison with Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service who had developed a dashboard which tracked certain indicators that aimed to reveal the culture of their organisation and the progress. North Wales Fire and Rescue Service hoped to develop a similar dashboard and this would be presented at a future Cultural Improvement Board.

7.3 It was further asked what channels were available for staff to report issues anonymously, and the CFO confirmed that although a Whistleblowing Policy was in place, a confidential hotline had also been implemented which people could submit concerns to, anonymously if required. While anonymous concerns were more difficult to look into, all concerns were fully investigated.

7.4 Thanks were given to officers for their ongoing work in this area.

7.5 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Approve the Strategic Cultural Improvement Plan; and**
- ii) **note the next steps on the cultural journey of the Service.**

8 TRAINING CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE

8.1 ACFO Evans delivered the Training Centre Project Update paper, a progress update on the training centre project summarising developments across legal, communications, design, ecology, and programme timelines.

8.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Note the current progress of the Training Centre project.**

9 EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW

9.1 ACFO Jones provided Members with an update on the work of the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Task and Finish subgroup. This was set up in response to the recommendation from the 20 January 2025 meeting for officers to continue to devise and test alternative solutions with representative bodies, within the agreed budget, to address emergency cover in rural locations.

9.2 It was noted that adverts had now been placed for staff to transfer to the nucleus crews, and the Chair enquired what the response had been. ACFO Jones confirmed that existing full-time (WDS) and on-call (RDS) firefighters who might be interested in migrating had been contacted, and it was hoped to increase the full-time rural (WDSR) cohort to full establishment so that the two pilots could be run together. Whilst expressions of interest were still being gathered, ACFO Jones was confident that the required numbers would be achieved.

- 9.3 A Member asked what the recruitment numbers had been like within the RDS cohort over the last 12-months, and ACFO Jones confirmed that he would obtain this information and pass it on to Members outside of the meeting. However, he stated that recruitment and retention was an ongoing process with around 50-60 staff members leaving the Service each year, although the Service were consistently recruiting more than that. It was noted that the training requirement to bring these new staff members to a competent skills level was a lengthy process.
- 9.4 The CFO confirmed that there had been a substantial net increase in numbers of retained firefighters over the last three years with around 230 employed within that period.
- 9.5 It was noted that the pilots would have to take place over an appropriate period and that careful monitoring each quarter would be required to assess the value and impact of each pilot over a 12- to 24-month period.
- 9.6 One Member felt that the process to improve cover in rural areas had taken too long a time, and that recent fires in those rural areas may have received a better response had this process been finalised earlier. They also felt that having a stable team in place with local knowledge would bring strength and consistency to the cover in rural areas.
- 9.7 ACFO Jones confirmed that the Service's 18-pump response model had been maintained throughout the whole ECR process, and that the Service was in a strong position in terms of union relationships which had benefitted the ECR process greatly.
- 9.8 In relation to the nucleus crewing model, it was anticipated that the same staff would be allocated to the nucleus crewing stations for the entirety of the pilot to ensure that motivated staff with local knowledge were in place to become part of the communities that they served.
- 9.9 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Note that officers have continued to work with representative bodies in social partnership to develop a way forward with the ECR;**
 - ii) **note that progress has been made by the signing of the Collective Agreement by the Fire Brigades Union;**
 - iii) **note the continued efforts of all parties to progress a solution and introduce a pilot to demonstrate the self-sufficiency of the staffing levels at the current wholetime fire stations; and**
 - iv) **note that by demonstrating this self-sufficiency that there is scope to introduce pilots to utilise existing establishment budgets to improve emergency cover model across rural North Wales.**

10 DRAFT STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2024-25

- 10.1 The Treasurer noted that these accounts had been before the Audit Committee already, and that there was no statutory requirement for the Authority to sign off the accounts in their pre-Audit form.
- 10.2 ACFO MacArthur presented the unaudited Statement of Accounts for 2024/25, encompassing the revenue and capital outturn, the balance sheet position, and key financial movements for the Authority.
- 10.3 Thanks were given to the Finance Team for their hard work in compiling these draft accounts and presenting them on time.

10.4 RESOLVED to:

- i) Approve the unaudited revenue and capital outturn position;**
- ii) approve the unaudited balance sheet position;**
- iii) approve the movement to and from reserves; and**
- iv) approve the delegation of authority for the approval of the audited Statement of Accounts to the Executive Panel.**

11 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024-2025

- 11.1 ACFO Jones delivered the Annual Governance Statement 2024-2025 which presented to Members the draft Annual Governance Statement (AGS), as required by the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014. It was submitted to Audit Wales on 31 May 2025.

11.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) Approve the Draft Annual Governance Statement**

12 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT, APRIL 2024 – MARCH 2025

- 12.1 AM Plant presented the Performance Monitoring Report, April 2024 – March 2025 which provided comparative data relating to the Authority's 'Our Five 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.
- 12.2 The report also highlighted emerging trends in both increased, reduced and new demands and informed the development of new or revised activity to mitigate any increasing and emergent demand and risk.

- 12.3 Some Members noted that the Phoenix courses and the Cadet Programme were very well run and appeared to be successful and so they felt that the youth work carried out by the Service was effective. However, they had a concern in relation to communication in relation to the prevention of tumble dryer fires, and AM Plant responded that a huge amount of education was carried out in relation to this area by the Prevention and Protection Team and this was also a key area of the Safe and Well checks.
- 12.4 A Member noted the increase in fires of 8.5% and queried this as the trend over the last few years had been decreasing. They also noted a 12.4% increase in false alarms and asked what work was being carried out with regards to reducing the number of Automatic Fire Alarms (AFA's) within domestic dwellings.
- 12.5 AM Plant responded that there had been a huge amount of work carried out identifying vulnerable people within communities and a great deal of complex work was carried out with these high-risk individuals and their families to reduce the risk as far as possible, including the installation of Carelines. This, in turn, contributed to the increase in false alarms as the Carelines were often activated for non-fire events resulting in a false alarm.
- 12.6 ACFO Jones further confirmed that there had been an increase in fire activity nationally and this was not an isolated issue within North Wales, but that the 8.5% increase in fires could largely be attributed to an increase in wildfires. He further stated that significant work had been taking place to reduce the occurrence of AFA's, but that each false activation was viewed as an opportunity for further engagement with homeowners. However, targeted prevention work with providers and residents was taking place to reduce unnecessary mobilisations and this remained a priority for the Service.
- 12.7 A Member asked for it to be noted that the professionalism and speed of response from the fire crews should be commended.
- 12.8 The Chair added that when the report had been considered by the Executive Panel, the following action in relation to 'safe and well' checks had been agreed: '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.'
- 12.9 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Note the content of the Performance Monitoring report.**

13 CHIEF FIRE AND RESCUE ADVISOR AND INSPECTOR FOR WALES'S INSPECTION REPORT

- 13.1 AM Plant presented an update following the publication of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor and Inspector for Wales (CFRAIW) inspection report, entitled 'Inspection of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service to consider the effectiveness of its response to domestic dwelling fires'.
- 13.2 One Member asked how this extra work would be budgeted for, and how it fit in with the Service's priorities. The CFO responded that these were essential initiatives that required implementation, but that it was also recognised that there was a great deal of work ongoing in other areas such as the nucleus crewing pilot and the Training Centre project. The urgency of the implementation was recognised, but discussions would need to take place with the CFRAIW to confirm a timeline, although it was hoped that additional capacity could be achieved by working on an all-Wales basis. Funding would be allocated via the normal budget process and some pieces of required equipment had already been secured.
- 13.3 The Chair noted that the creation of a new training centre facility was now more important than ever to fulfil the recommendations of the CFRAIW report, and that every opportunity to lobby Welsh Government for additional funding for this project was taken advantage of. ACFO Jones confirmed that he would be taking this issue to the all-Wales National Issues Committee for Operations in Cardiff to agree a common approach and timeframe. He had also presented to the NFCC Operational Preparedness, Resilience and Response Committee and the NFCC were interested to see what Wales's approach would be as the changes recommended by the CFRAIW were reflected within the National Operational Guidance (NOG) documentation and so England would be required to make similar changes to firefighting techniques within England.
- 13.4 **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.**

14 FIREFIGHTERS PENSION SCHEMES DISCRETIONARY POLICY STATEMENT

- 14.1 ACFO MacArthur delivered the Firefighters Pension Schemes Discretionary Policy Statement which informed Members of the requirement for the Scheme Manager, the Authority, to produce a Firefighters Pension Discretionary Policy Statement.
- 14.2 It was noted that approval was also sought of the resolutions within the Firefighters Pension Scheme Discretionary Policy Statement including the proposal that, on behalf of the scheme manager, decisions would be delegated on a day-to-day basis to officers of the Service.

- 14.3 The Treasurer noted the vast amount of work that had been undertaken, including by Kim Jeal, the Technical Pensions Adviser shared with South Wales Fire and Rescue Service (SWFRS), and assurance had been received that the recommendations were consistent with those being put forward by them. He congratulated officers in compiling such a comprehensive report and recommended that the statement be approved.

14.4 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Approve the resolutions within the Firefighters Pension Scheme Discretionary Policy Statement including, where appropriate, the delegation to officers of the Service.**

15 FIREFIGHTERS PENSION SCHEMES LOCAL PENSION BOARD – ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

- 15.1 Dafydd Edwards, Treasurer and Chair of the Local Pension Board (the Board) presented to Members the Annual Report of the Board which detailed the work undertaken during the 2024/25 financial year. The salient areas of the Annual Report were highlighted.
- 15.2 ACFO MacArthur confirmed that the input of both the employer and employee representatives was invaluable, not only to the day-to-day functions of the scheme but also for horizon scanning. The legal challenges had placed an incredible strain on a small department, but progress was positive.

15.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Approve the Local Pension Board 2024/25 Annual Report.**

16 RATIFICATIONS OF APPOINTMENT OF PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

- 16.1 The Clerk confirmed that recommendations were being made to the full Authority for the appointment of Anthony Jones and Justin Evans, and that the item had been placed last on the agenda in the event that a closed session was required.
- 16.2 The CFO added that the appointment process had been hugely demanding but successful, and thanks were given to those Members who formed the interview panel. It had been the final stage of a very challenging process for both internal and external candidates. An independent consultant had created the longlist of applicants who were subsequently assessed, and a shortlist was developed from these assessments. Those three applicants were then further assessed for their managerial capability, their handling of a media situation, and their report writing and information gathering skills. During the interview itself, thought provoking presentations were made by all candidates and several topical issues relevant to senior leaders within the sector were discussed.

- 16.3 The Chair advised that there had been six Authority Members on the panel, one from each local authority, and all agreed that there had been three high quality candidates. The unanimous findings of the panel were that Anthony Jones and Justin Evans should be appointed as substantive Assistant Chief Fire Officers for the Service. This recommendation was proposed and seconded with all in favour and congratulations were given to both appointees.
- 16.4 A Member noted their disappointment that, although it had been stated clearly that it was only members of the Executive Panel that could be included in the appointment process, the initial invite had gone out to all Authority Members. This had then been redacted but was again offered at short notice to members of the Audit Committee. The Chair responded that, as there had only been one female member of the Executive Panel who was unable to take part in the process due to annual leave, it had been offered out to female members of the Audit Committee in order to maintain a gender balance.
- 16.5 The Clerk confirmed that gender balance had been a consideration and that arrangements had been attempted within the bounds of the Executive Panel; however, the gender balance had ultimately been lost due to availability issues.
- 16.6 ACFO Jones and ACFO Evans both gave thanks to Members and stated that they were immensely proud to have been substantively appointed to the post.
- 16.7 RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Ratify the appointment of Anthony Jones and Justin Evans to the substantive position of Assistant Chief Fire Officer.**

17 URGENT MATTERS

- 16.1 There were no urgent matters to consider.

Members and Officers were thanked for their participation.

Meeting closed: 11:35