

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** held on **Monday 20 January 2025** virtually via **Zoom**. Meeting commenced at **09.30**.

Councillor

Dylan Rees (Chair)
Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
Bryan Apsley
Carol Beard
Tina Claydon
Adele Davies-Cooke
Jeff Evans
Alan Hughes
Chris Hughes (from 09:48)
John Brynmor Hughes
John Ifan Jones
Marc Jones
Gwynfor Owen
Beverley Parry-Jones
Arwyn Herald Roberts
Gareth A Roberts
Rondo Roberts
Dale Selvester
Rob Triggs
Antony Wren
Mark Young

Representing

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

Also present:

Dawn Docx
Stewart Forshaw
Helen MacArthur
Stuart Millington
Anthony Jones
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
Elgan Roberts
Steve Morris
Tracey Williams
George Jones
Lisa Allington

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

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Marion Bateman
Sharon Doleman
Gareth R Jones
Austin Roberts
Paul Rogers
Gareth Sandilands

Representing

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

ABSENT

Councillor

Michelle Walker

Representing

Denbighshire County Council

The above apologies were offered and accepted.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 No notice of urgent matters had been received.

4 MINUTES OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 21 OCTOBER 2024

4.1 The minutes of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) meeting held on 21 October 2024 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the FRA minutes from 21 October 2024 as a true and correct record of the meeting held.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 The CFO advised that in relation to item 7.3, the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's review into firefighting techniques, the review within North Wales had now commenced with fieldwork research beginning on 27 January. It was anticipated that the report would be published sometime during February.

5.2 In relation to item 7.6 wherein the changes to the governance model for the three Welsh Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRA's) was discussed, the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) noted that this was a more pressing situation in South Wales as the Service would need to know what would be implemented following the removal of the Commissioners. The Cabinet Secretary would be consulting on potential options and would be soliciting views in the Spring of 2025.

- 5.3 In relation to item 7.8, the notification that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) had decided to retire, Members were advised that he had since rescinded that resignation, and the CFO was pleased to welcome him back. However, two very important members of the Service leadership Team (SLT) had since announced that they would be leaving – Area Manager Justin Evans, who had acted as Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) for the last year, had decided to retire at the end of March and Tracey Williams, Head of Corporate Communications for 15 years, had also decided to move onto the next chapter of her career. The CFO gave thanks to them both for their hard work and dedication throughout their time with North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service).
- 5.4 The DCFO provided an update on Item 9, the New Training Centre Business Case, and advised Members that following its approval, a Training Centre Project Board was being established and expressions of interest had been invited from Members to become the Lead Members for the project. Cllr Gareth Sandilands had put his name forward and had been successful. The first meeting was planned to take place on 27 January. The Chair gave thanks to Cllr Sandilands and stated that he was sure Cllr Sandilands would bring great value to the project board.
- 5.5 The Chair welcomed Cllr Antony Wren, new Member for Flintshire County Council, to the meeting.

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 October and December 2024.
- 6.2 The Chair noted that members of the Fire Service had been instrumental in helping those affected by the burst watermain at Bryn Colwyd waterworks. He asked that his thanks be passed on to all concerned and felt that it was important to note the wide variety of services carried out by members of the Fire Service.
- 6.3 The Deputy Chair advised Members of the sad news that Brian Gorling, ex-Firefighter from Colwyn Bay, had passed away and Members were asked if someone could attend to represent the Authority at his funeral.

6.2 RESOLVED to:

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

7 INDEPENDENT CULTURAL REVIEW UPDATE

- 7.1 The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) provided Members with a progress report into the cultural review which was commissioned from the independent consultancy firm Crest Advisory in July 2024.
- 7.2 Members were informed that the report would likely be published in late January, early February as work was still taking place in finalising the detail and having the reports translated.
- 7.3 Around a third of staff took part in the surveys and interviews, around 300 of 1000 employees. There had been no individual incidents of sexism or racism; however, there were themes around leadership style which the Service was already aware of and were being addressed and staff were being educated that the style of management that may have been appropriate many years ago was not appropriate for today.
- 7.4 There had been a recognition that there had been an improvement in culture over recent years and staff were proud to work for the Service. The FBU had expressed their desire to support the Service on its cultural journey, and were keen to highlight that they had the best interests of the Service and its employees at heart, and that they looked forward to working positively with the Service on its cultural journey
- 7.5 The Chair noted that it was difficult to make informed comments without sight of the report; however, he said that he did not support the second recommendation as he felt that all Members should be allowed to attend a meeting with Crest Advisory. Members supported this statement, and the recommendation was amended accordingly.
- 7.6 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Note the progress of the Independent Cultural Review and the timescales for publication contained in the report; and**
 - ii) **agree that all Members of the Authority should be invited to attend a webinar with Crest to discuss the findings of the review and recommendations for the future.**

8 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2024-25

- 8.1 Elgan Roberts, Head of Finance and Procurement, delivered the Provisional Outturn for 2024-25 which aimed to provide Members with an update on the revenue and capital expenditure forecast for 2024/25, as of 31 December 2024.

- 8.2 Paragraph 13 of the paper was highlighted and it was noted that clarity over the pay award had now been received. A pay award of 4.5% had been budgeted for members of local government staff, and it had now been confirmed that staff on pay points 2 to 43 had received an uplift of just under £1,300, with staff on pay points 44 and upwards receiving 2.5%. This had resulted in a slight cost pressure which was being managed internally.
- 8.3 Based on year-to-date expenditure, the most likely full year forecast as at the end of December indicated an underspend of just over £0.5m. The range in the outturn position was due to the ongoing legal challenge in relation to Firelink, which could reduce in-year costs by around £0.5m; however, as it was not certain that this would be resolved by the year end, an earmarked reserve would be established.
- 8.4 A Member asked how monies that were requested via the levy but not required would be returned to the Local Authorities, and ACFO MacArthur responded that the funds would not be returned, but would be put into reserves to cover future costs in relation to the Emergency Services Network which it was anticipated would gather momentum over coming years and would result in both revenue and capital obligations in order to implement.
- 8.5 A Member asked if a cost pressure was being created due to the shortfall of 30 members of RDS staff, and would this be alleviated if it were budgeted for. The Head of Finance clarified that the additional requirement had been reduced from 30 to 15 and that this had already been budgeted for.
- 8.6 It was further enquired whether overtime costs were budgeted for and ACFO MacArthur confirmed that the establishment around wholetime staff was fully budgeted for and that overtime was managed within this, albeit not totally cost-neutral. It was requested that further figures around this be provided at a later meeting.

8.7 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **note the projected revenue outturn position and the projected capital slippage for the 2024/25 financial year, as detailed within the report;**
- ii) **note the risks associated with the provisional outturn and recognise that the figures forecasted in this report are prudent; and**
- iii) **note the proposed movement to reserves of £0.070m for slippage on non-pay expenditure relating to operational equipment.**

9 EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW (ECR)

- 9.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented to Members an update on the work of the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Task and Finish Group, established in response to the decision made by the Authority at its meeting on 18 December 2023. The purpose of this group was to research and develop a new permanent option to improve the provision of emergency cover across North Wales.
- 9.2 the CFO emphasised that working relationships with all representative bodies, including the FBU, were very good and the working group, having done so much work, understood that the models being looked at wouldn't work with the limited resources available in North Wales. As such, rather than waste any more time, the FBU had decided to withdraw, but had expressed that they were very keen to continue to explore other options.
- 9.3 The Chair further confirmed that FBU representatives were fully invested in the process of working with officers to find a solution and continued to provide their own views as to how this might work. He further noted that a solution had to be found as soon as possible to reduce the risk to members of the community.
- 9.4 Members felt reassured following the verbal updates above; however, one Member queried whether a deadline had been implemented. ACFO Jones responded that a meeting of the working group would take place on 21 January, and all involved were keen to reach an agreement as soon as possible. Meetings would take place every six weeks and it was hoped that an agreement would be reached by the next group in February or failing that, the following meeting.
- 9.5 A Member proposed that an additional recommendation be added that Members support the ECR working group in working towards a viable option. This proposal was seconded.
- 9.6 Another Member noted that this process had already taken two years, and it was disappointing that a solution had not yet been reached.

9.7 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Note that officers continued to work with staff and representative bodies in social partnership to develop the ECR Task and Finish Group research models two, three or variations of them;**
- ii) **note the agreed conclusion that the five-watch duty system will not work in North Wales and as a result, the withdrawal of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) and closure of the task and finish group;**
- iii) **Appreciate the efforts and contribution made by the ECR Task and Finish Group Members;**
- iv) **Ask officers to continue to devise and test alternative solutions with the representative bodies, within the agreed budget, to address emergency cover in rural locations; and**
- v) **Support the ECR Working Group in working towards a viable option.**

10 BUDGET SETTING 2025-26

- 10.1 ACFO Helen MacArthur, delivered the Budget Setting 2025-26 paper, which aimed to provide Members with an update on the current financial planning assessment to set a balanced budget for 2025/26, and to seek endorsement to confirm the indicative levy with constituent local authorities.
- 10.2 The Treasurer thanked ACFO MacArthur and all those involved in setting the budget. He also provided some context in that several meetings of the Budget Scrutiny Committee had taken place, and key detailed work had been carried out within these meetings, with an appropriate balance being achieved. He asked Members to note that there had been no significant changes in the figures since the Audit Committee and Executive Panel meetings held on 16 December at which Members had agreed to recommend the budget to the full Authority.
- 10.3 The Chair confirmed that an online meeting had recently been held with Leaders and Chief Executives of the six local authorities and they had confirmed that there had been no surprises in the budget provided. They had thanked ACFO MacArthur for her regular communication with Section 151 Officers in this regard.
- 10.4 A Member stated that he felt it to be disappointing that the allocation received from the Welsh Government via the formula did not equate to the monies required via the levy to the Authority. They further noted that the greatest increase was to Gwynedd who were second to last in the allocations received from the Welsh Government.

10.5 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the findings of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group, including the planning assumptions being used to develop the revenue budget for 2025/26;**
- ii) note the current financial planning assessment of a budget requirement of £52.389m for 2025/26;**
- iii) note the proposal to utilise £0.601m of reserves for 2025/26; and**
- iv) endorse the communication of the draft financial levy of £51.788m from the constituent local authorities.**

11 WELSH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION – EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTION RATES FOR THE FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME

- 11.1 ACFO Helen MacArthur presented to Members the Welsh Government Consultation – employee contribution rates for the firefighters' pension scheme paper which provided information on the Welsh Government's consultation on proposed changes to the employee contribution rates for the firefighters' pension scheme in Wales.

11.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) note the background to the Welsh Government consultation; and**
- ii) approve the response to be submitted on behalf of the Authority.**

12 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT 2023-2024

- 12.1 DCFO Stewart Forshaw, presented the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Performance Assessment 2023-2024 paper which requested Members' approval of the annual assessment of the Authority's performance during 2023/24.

12.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) Approve the annual assessment of the Authority's performance in 2023/24 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.**

13 POWER DECARBONISATION PLAN

- 13.1 ACFO Stuart Millington presented the Power Decarbonisation Plan which set out the details of the Service's Power Decarbonisation Plan (the Plan), which provided detailed measures and timescales to mitigate the carbon emissions arising from the electricity consumption of the Service's fleet and estate for the period up to 2030.

13.2 The Chair gave thanks to Tim Christensen for his hard work in this area.

13.3 A Member commended the quality of the work carried out and recommended that the resolutions be approved by Members.

13.4 **RESOLVED to:**

i) Approve the Power Decarbonisation Plan.

14 RESIDUAL CARBON EMISSIONS PLAN

14.1 ACFO Stuart Millington delivered to Members the Residual Carbon Emissions Plan which set out the details of the Service's Residual Carbon Emissions Plan (the Plan), which provided detailed measures and timescales to mitigate those carbon emissions which had not been mitigated by the Decarbonisation Plans in place for Fleet, Heating and Power for the period up to 2030.

14.2 **RESOLVED to:**

**i) Approve the Residual Carbon Emissions Plan; and
ii) direct the Environment and Climate Change Manager to begin implementing the Plan only once all carbon emissions arising under Scopes 1 and 2 have been fully mitigated.**

15 URGENT MATTERS

15.1 There were no urgent matters to consider.

Members and Officers were thanked for their participation.

Meeting closed: 10:44