

**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
EXECUTIVE PANEL**

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 16th July 2012 at Fire and Rescue Headquarters, St Asaph. Meeting commenced at 2pm.

PRESENT

Cllr A M Jones (Chair)	Anglesey County Council
Cllr M Ll Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr A Evans	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr W I Hughes	Anglesey County Council
Cllr E A Jones	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr P W Owen	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr W R Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr W T Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council

ALSO PRESENT:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); C Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer); K Finch (Treasurer); D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); P Claydon and R Simmons (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); R Fairhead (Senior Training and Development Manager); G W Griffiths (Senior Fire Safety Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); Rh W Williams (Corporate Communications Department); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer); S Jones (Member Liaison Assistant); A Bruce (Wales Audit Office); V DeZouche (KPMG).

Apologies:

Cllr A I Dunbar	Flintshire County Council
Cllr B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
Cllr P R Lewis	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr P Pemberton	Wrexham County Borough Council

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 None.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6TH FEBRUARY 2012

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 6th February were approved as a correct record.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Matters arising from the minutes were as follows:

- 3.2 5.11 - Aerial Ladder Platform – ACFO Claydon updated Members about the ALP situation. Following the Authority's decision to adopt the 30-minute attendance for ALP standard, the fourth ALP had been removed from service at the end of its working life in March 2012 and the three remaining ALPs relocated to Bangor, Rhyl and Wrexham.
- 3.3 7.9 - Discretionary compensation for the early termination of employment – ACFO Simmons informed Members that following a question raised at a previous meeting about the powers of the Authority to set up such a scheme, officers had sought legal advice. Officers are continuing to work through this piece of advice and employees have been notified of the latest developments. The Chief Fire Officer drew Members' attention to paragraph 7.8 of the minutes which stated that redundancy was an option that everyone would prefer to avoid, but due to the circumstances it could not be ruled out.
- 3.4 9.6 – Fire and Rescue National Framework 2012 - The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Fire and Rescue National Framework for 2012 onwards has been published and the Authority is now working to that framework.
- 3.5 11.4 - Proposed purchase of the Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters Building – the DCFO informed Members that the Authority had approved the purchase of the HQ building as it would be more cost-effective to buy the asset than to pay rent. The price has been further reduced through negotiation with the vendor and it is now in the hands of the solicitors.
- 4 ANNUAL FINANCIAL AUDIT OUTLINE
- 4.1 Ms V DeZouche from KPMG presented the annual Financial Audit outline. The document sets out the audit work to be undertaken in order to be able to give an opinion on the Authority's 2011-12 financial statements.
- 4.2 Under the provisions of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 the Auditor General for Wales has appointed KPMG to undertake this work for the Authority. Ms DeZouche informed Members that the audit process was underway and that it was progressing smoothly.
- 4.3 Cllr E A Jones questioned how the cost of the audit work was determined. It was confirmed that the price is set by the Auditor General and that there was a 5% decrease in the fee compared the 2010-11 fee.
- 4.4 **RESOLVED to note the Annual Financial Audit Outline.**
- 5 REGULATORY PROGRAMME FOR PERFORMANCE AUDIT 2012-13
- 5.1 Mr A Bruce from the Wales Audit Office presented the Regulatory Programme for Performance Audit 2012-13. The document set out the work to be undertaken in 2012-13 by the Wales Audit Office. Areas of work include looking at key performance indicators, collaboration and reviewing the improvement studies.

5.2 In response to a question about the Wales Audit Office's awareness of the Fire and Rescue Authority's work on collaboration, Mr Bruce confirmed that he was very aware of the Authority's collaborative work to date.

5.3 **RESOLVED to note the Regulatory Programme for Performance Audit 2012-13.**

6 FINANCIAL PRESENTATION

6.1 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave a presentation on the Authority's financial situation. Members were informed about the following issues:

6.2 The Authority has a revenue budget of £32million and a capital budget in addition to specific grant funds received from the Welsh Government. The revenue budget has been frozen at £32million, which is part of the 3 year financial plan agreed in December 2010. Over £800,000 savings were made in the first year (2011-12), and the Authority is on target to save a similar amount in this second year of the 3 year plan.

6.3 The Authority has looked at all areas of spend, and the Improvement Plan Working Group will need to look for new and innovative ways to make savings for the next three years. The savings for this current year have been achieved by introducing a more flexible way of working on the wholetime duty system. Cllr E A Jones welcomed flexible working as from previous experience she had found it to be beneficial to staff and organisations.

6.4 The National Issues Committee which has been established will enable the three FRAs in Wales to work together to generate a more structured programme of collaboration with a view to savings being made across all three FRAs in Wales.

6.5 The Authority is a levying Authority and the constituent authorities are expected to pay the amount requested by the Authority which usually equates to less than 2% of the constituent authority's budget. The Authority, to date, has had a good relationship with the constituent authorities with the levying exercise conducted with mutual cooperation. Members were reminded that they would have to make decisions on the FRA budget which will be in the best interest of the FRA not their constituent authorities.

6.6 The Treasurer gave a national perspective and explained that future financial settlements from the Welsh Government could be even tougher than they have been to date.

6.7 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

7 MEMBERSHIP OF IMPROVEMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP

7.1 Members were invited to agree the membership of an Improvement Plan (IP) Working Group.

7.2 The Local Government Measure 2009 requires Welsh improvement authorities to set themselves improvement objectives and consult widely on how to fulfil their improvement duties. The Fire and Rescue Authorities (Improvement Plans) (Wales) Order 2012 requires those authorities to publish their agreed IP as soon as reasonably practicable after 31 December prior to the financial year to which it relates.

7.3 The Authority has had a working group since 2003 for the purpose of developing plans in accordance with the planning requirements in existence at the time, and this has become an integral part of the budget and planning process. Due to the importance of this work it is recommended that the full membership of the Executive Panel should make up the Improvement Plan Working Group.

7.4 **RESOLVED to**

(i) agree that the full membership of the Executive Panel becomes the membership of the IP Working Group;

(ii) note the dates of the IP Working Group meetings.

8 2012-13 IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES

8.1 The report was presented to ask Members to consider restating the Authority's published Improvement Objectives for the current year (2012-13).

8.2 The Corporate Planning Manager explained that rather than trying to focus on 8 objectives, restating two of the eight would enable a better focus and present a clearer message about the Authority's highest priority areas. The other six objectives would be incorporated within departmental action plans to be achieved as planned, thereby meeting the Authority's general duty to improve.

8.3 The objectives themselves would continue to be outcome-focused, with measurement criteria (indicators of successful delivery) clearly set out. It was noted that the Wales Audit Office's response to the possibility of adopting this approach had been positive.

8.4 The Clerk commented that this was a good approach and useful to have the objectives considered as primary and secondary objectives. He suggested amending the wording of objective 2 (r) to read '... in order to operate within the annual budget'.

8.5 **RESOLVED to approve the proposal to restate the Authority's existing eight improvement objectives, and agree the restated objectives for the current year (2012-13) as follows:**

OBJ 1(r) To help to keep people and communities safe by preventing deaths and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation.

OBJ 2(r) To find ways of reducing the overall cost of running the Service each year in order to operate within the annual budget.

9 IMPROVEMENT PLAN DEVELOPMENT TIMETABLE

- 9.1 Members were invited to agree a timetable for compiling and publishing the Authority's Improvement Plan 2013-14.
- 9.2 In order to meet the requirements of the Fire and Rescue Authorities (Improvement Plans) (Wales) Order 2012 in relation to publishing the Improvement Plan by 31st March of each year, several stages of development need to be concluded and timely decisions taken.
- 9.3 The Clerk suggested that in order to get councils more engaged in the consultation process, Members could consider inviting officers to attend a council meeting to discuss the consultation and also the consultation could become part of the Local Service Board agenda.
- 9.4 **RESOLVED to note and approve the proposed timetable for developing the Authority's Improvement Plan 2013-14 as follows:**

16 July 2012	Executive Panel agrees the membership of the Improvement Plan (IP) Working Group.
23 July 2012	First meeting of the IP Working Group to develop the 2013-14 objectives.
13 August 2012	Second meeting of the IP Working Group to develop the 2013-14 objectives.
17 September 2012	Executive Panel considers the recommendations of the IP Working Group as regards the 2013-14 objectives.
15 October 2012	Full Fire and Rescue Authority considers the recommendations of the Executive Panel and approves the draft Improvement Objectives for public consultation. Consultation period to be decided - 10 weeks = 24/12/12. 12 weeks = 7/1/13.
19 November 2012	Executive Panel considers a draft budget for 2013-14.
17 December 2012	Full Fire and Rescue Authority considers a draft budget 2013-14.
4 February 2013	Executive Panel considers the consultation responses and finalises the IP in the context of the budget for 2013-14, for recommendation to the full Fire and Rescue Authority.
18 March 2013	Full Fire and Rescue Authority gives final approval of the IP for publication before 31 March 2013.

10 DEVELOPING THE STANDARD RESPONSE

- 10.1 The report was presented to inform Members of progress being made towards the development of a Dwelling Fire Response Standard.
- 10.2 The Corporate Planning Manager explained the various national standards that had been in place since 1944. Following devolution in 2005, the Welsh Government established a service standard for attendance at fires in homes and in 2006 a review was undertaken of the established Standard. The review

recognised the various profiles of the three FRAs in Wales and that a national standard for Wales was unsuitable. For example, a standard suitable for an urban area such as Cardiff would not be achievable in rural areas across Wales. Thereafter each FRA was required to develop and consult locally on its own dwelling fire response criteria, subject to guiding principles issued by the Wales Government.

- 10.3 Following a Fire and Rescue Circular issued in March 2012, each FRA is now expected to develop and consult on its local response criteria, and publish them in its Improvement Plan for 2013-14. The three FRAs have jointly prepared a draft 'All-Wales Dwelling Fire Response Charter' for consideration by the National Issues Committee.
- 10.4 The draft Charter takes account of the requirement for FRAs to design and consult on local response criteria but also takes the opportunity to ensure a level of consistency across Wales. If adopted, the Charter would provide Welsh residents and householders with a clear picture of what they can expect from their Fire and Rescue Service, but without fettering the FRAs' discretion to determine what is appropriate for their own areas.
- 10.5 It was confirmed that a variable standard could be set across North Wales; the key requirement is for the standard to be meaningful. The Chief Fire Officer also confirmed that the Service will continue to send the nearest resource to arrive as quickly and as safely as possible at incidents. Cllr E A Jones felt it was important to recognise the approach taken and that it was a method of ensuring consistency but which enabled each Authority to reach its own safety standard.
- 10.6 The Chairs and Chief Fire Officers of the FRAs in Wales had met with the Minister on 27th June and he was interested in the development of the National Issues Committee. The NIC will focus on collaboration but with each Authority retaining its separate entity. The inaugural meeting of the NIC was due to be held on 17th July. It was confirmed that a report from each NIC meeting would be presented at Authority meetings.
- 10.7 **RESOLVED to note the progress being made and the proposed future steps towards the development of a North Wales FRA Dwelling Fire Response Standard.**