

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
AUDIT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the **Audit Committee** of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 16 December 2024 virtually via Zoom. Meeting commenced at 09.30hrs.

Councillor

Mark Young (Chair)
Gwynfor Owen (Deputy Chair)
Marion Bateman
Tina Claydon
Adele Davies-Cooke
John Brynmor Hughes
Gareth R Jones
Beverley Parry-Jones
Arwyn Herald Roberts (left 10:15)
Dale Selvester

Representing

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

Also present:

Helen MacArthur
Elgan W Roberts
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
Anne-Marie Harrop
Angharad Ellis
George Jones
Lisa Allington

Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Head of Finance and Procurement
Treasurer
Monitoring Officer
Mersey Internal Audit Agency
Mersey Internal Audit Agency
Translator
Executive Assistant – Note taker

1.0 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Sharon Doleman

Representing

Conwy County Borough Council

ABSENT

Councillor

Bryan Apsley
Jeff Evans
Marc Jones
Austin Roberts
Michelle Walker

Representing

Wrexham County Borough Council
Anglesey County Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Denbighshire County Council

2.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest to record.

3.0 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 There was no notice of urgent matters.

4.0 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 SEPTEMBER 2024

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 September 2024 were submitted for approval. It was noted that apologies had been recorded for Cllr Dylan Rees; however, as he was attending as an observer, this was not necessary and should therefore be disregarded.

4.2 Cllr Gareth R Jones asked that it be noted that he had been present at the meeting but his apologies had been recorded.

4.3 RESOLVED to:

i) approve the minutes as a true and accurate record of the meetings held, noting the above amendments.

5.0 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 ACFO HM confirmed that in relation to paragraph 5.2, confirmation had been received that the SCAPE pension was being fully funded by the Welsh Government at a sum of £627,000.

6.0 PROGRESS REPORT FROM INTERNAL AUDIT

6.1 Angharad Ellis from MIAA was welcomed to the meeting and presented the progress report from Internal Audit, which aimed to provide Members of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) with an update of the work undertaken by the Authority's internal audit providers, MIAA, for the 2024/25 financial year to date.

6.2 It was confirmed that all outstanding actions would be followed up in 2025 to ensure that they were completed.

6.3 ACFO MacArthur noted that there were strong controls in place and thanked the Finance team and those at MIAA for their work in this area.

6.4 It was confirmed that while the training strategy had not been looked at in total this year, the business plan for the new Training Centre was on the forward work plan for review next year.

6.5 It was noted that MIAA delivered a number of free events and it was requested that Members be notified of these as they arose.

6.6 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the work undertaken by MIAA during 2024/25.**

7.0 TREASURY MANAGEMENT UPDATE Q2 2024/25

7.1 Dafydd Edwards, Authority Treasurer, presented the Treasury Management Update, the purpose of which was to provide Members of the Authority with an update on the treasury management activity and compliance with the treasury management prudential indicators for the period 1 April 2024 to 30 September 2024.

7.2 It was highlighted that there would be a chance that the Authority may need to borrow funds over the next 12 months, and that this had been recorded as a risk as more interest would need to be paid as a result.

7.3 RESOLVED to:

- i) note the treasury management activities and prudential indicators for the period 1 April – 30 September 2024.**

8.0 BUDGET SETTING 2025-26

8.1 ACFO MacArthur gave Members a background to the establishment of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and the involvement of MIAA in the budget setting process, and gave an overview of the high-level figures included within the report. This confirmed a gross budget requirement of £52.389m and the proposal to utilise £0.6m of reserves for non-recurring expenditure. The net levy requirement for 2025/26 would be £51.588m reflecting an increase of 7%, and fully incorporating costs of circa 2% arising from the recent increases to employer national insurance contributions. Adjusting for the national insurance contribution, the year on year increase would be 5%.

8.2 Elgan Roberts, Head of Finance and Procurement, then presented the Budget Setting 2025-26 paper which looked 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.

8.3 The members of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group were thanked for their invaluable contribution to the budget setting process.

8.4 The key figures within the report were discussed at length and a Member asked whether the Airwave figures had been included within the budget. It was also queried whether a levy excluding the National Insurance figures could be included within the table presented to the Authority at its meeting in January 2025.

- 8.5 It was confirmed that an additional column would be added to show the levy less the National Insurance. Members were also advised that the court case for Airwave was currently being appealed and should it not be found in the Service's favour, reserves would be utilised to cover the cost. However, it looked likely that the Service would win the appeal.
- 8.6 A Member asked if there was a reason for the increase in levy for Gwynedd, despite the fact that the financial support from the Welsh Government placed them as the lowest in Wales per head of population. It was explained that the increased population in Gwynedd needed to be compared to the increase in population in Cardiff and Swansea, and the assessment of need for each local authority.
- 8.7 The Treasurer noted that by its nature, the budget setting process was based on a number of assumptions and so was not an exact science. Whilst officers tried to be prudential, there remained a number of risks as a result. However, it was felt that the budget that had been presented to Members was robust.

8.8 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.**

9.0 LOCAL GOVERNMENT (WALES) MEASURE 2009

- 9.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented all three of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 papers, which confirmed to Members the outcome of the external audit of the Authority's Assessment of 2022-23 Performance, as required by the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009 (the Measure).
- 9.2 It was noted that there had been three certificates of compliance received from Audit Wales in relation to the Measure; the Assessment of Performance for 2022-23; the Assessment of Performance for 2023-24; and the Improvement Plan for 2024-25.
- 9.3 Members were informed that the delay in the Assessment of Performance for 2022-23 had been due to a sickness absence within Audit Wales rather than any issue within the Service itself.

9.4 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the audit letters which confirm that the Authority has discharged its responsibilities under the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009.**

10.0 APPROVAL OF BANK MANDATE

- 10.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the Approval of Bank Mandate paper which aimed to seek approval from Members in relation to the delegation of banking arrangements.
- 10.2 A Member asked whether requiring two signatures may cause issues with regards to availability.
- 10.3 Another Member enquired whether, with the above in mind, it may be prudent to have four signatories to account for the possibility of staff absence, and it was clarified that the signatories being approved today were for core functions only, such as approving signatories for day-to-day duties such as approving payments.

10.4 RESOLVED to:

- i) Approve the proposed delegation of the activities set out within the paper to any two signatories from the following; the Chief Fire Officer, the Authority's Treasurer or the Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Finance and Resources.**

11.0 TRAINING CENTRE CONSULTANCY PROCUREMENT PROPOSAL

- 11.1 ACFO Justin Evans delivered the proposed procurement strategy for the appointment of consultancy professionals for the new training centre project.

11.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) Endorse the proposed compliant procurement route of professional consultancy services through a public sector framework;**

12.0 URGENT MATTERS

- 11.1 There were no urgent matters to discuss.

Meeting closed 10:30