

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the Executive Panel meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Tuesday 13th December 2005 at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, St. Asaph. Meeting commenced at 12.05pm.

Present:

Councillor

Representing

T Roberts (Chairman)
M Williams (Vice-Chairman)

Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council

J A MacLennan (substitute)
J A Smith
E Morgan Jones
G M Craddock
E C George
W J Chorlton

Conwy County Borough Council
Denbighshire County Council
Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Ynys Môn County Council

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); I R Miller (Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); C Enness (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); P S Claydon (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery); C Hanks (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Support); P L Slee (Assistant Chief Officer, Corporate Services); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); R D Peacock (North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority Member, present as an observer) and Rh Evans (Member Liaison Officer).

PART I

1) Apologies

Councillor

Representing

S C Jones
J M Vaughan
D Jones MBE
D Barratt
W T Owen
J A Roberts

Conwy County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Gwynedd Council
Ynys Môn County Council

2) Notice of Urgent Matters

Members were informed by the Chairman that a statement would be made by the Chief Fire Officer in relation to a letter and consultation document recently issued by the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), titled, "Service Standards for Attendance to Fires in the Home and Risk Reduction Planning Guidance for the Fire and Rescue Authorities".

The Panel was also advised that, following the IRMP Working Group's meeting, he had received and accepted a request for a discussion on another urgent business item which would be discussed under Part II business.

The Chairman welcomed Councillor J A MacLennan to the meeting. Councillor MacLennan was substituting at the meeting for Councillor S C Jones. Panel members were informed by the Chairman that Councillor S C Jones remained in hospital at present and was currently only allowed receive visits from members of her family.

3) Minutes

The following minutes were submitted:

- i. Executive Panel meeting held on 26th October 2005

Resolved: - to approve the minutes as a true and correct record of proceedings

4) Matters Arising

The following matters arose from the minutes:

Page 2, Item 4, Matters Arising – The Relationship between the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) and the Fire and Rescue Service in Wales: the Panel was advised by the Chief Fire Officer that the inaugural meeting of the Association's Wales Fire Services' Panel had been held on 25th November 2005. Due to the adverse weather conditions the Chairman of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority, who had been attending other meetings in Cardiff that day, had to leave Cardiff before that start of the Panel's meeting. The Chief Fire Officer had participated in the meeting via video link. The Chairman of South Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and the Chief Fire Officers of South Wales and Mid and West Wales Fire Services; Mr Steve Thomas, Director of the WLGA; and other Association officers were also in attendance. The weather conditions had also prohibited the Chairman of Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Authority from attending. Members were informed by the Chief Fire Officer that he had raised the issue of the Panel's membership at the meeting and had suggested that each Authority should be represented by five elected members. The other representatives present disagreed with this view and voted in favour of each authority being represented by its Chair and Vice-Chair, with these arrangements to be reviewed after 12 months. Indications had been given at

the meeting that representatives would be permitted to bring members with them as observers to WLGA Fire Services' Panel meetings. Executive Panel members were informed by the Chairman that he was less than satisfied with this outcome, particularly in view of the fact that only one political representative was present at the meeting. He advised members that he intended to raise the matter again at the WLGA Fire Services' Panel's next meeting. Councillor E C George reminded members that North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority had discussed at length the issue of the number of representatives to serve on this type of committee. He was of the view that if the other two authorities continued to agree that the Chair and Vice-Chair of each authority was sufficient representation on the WLGA's Panel, North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority may need to review its decision not to apply political balance when nominating representatives to serve on committees. If the membership of the Association's Panel was not expanded to include additional representatives from each authority, the Panel would become nothing more than the former Wales Fire Services' Forum under a different name. Councillors E C George and W J Chorlton were of the view that the Authority should make representations to the WLGA registering its objections to the decision. The Chief Fire Officer suggested that making representations may be premature at this stage and that it would be prudent for the Authority to wait until the notes of the inaugural meeting had been published. He undertook, upon receipt of the notes of the inaugural meeting of the WLGA's Fire Services' Panel, to circulate a copy of them to all Executive Panel members. It was:

Resolved: -

- i. that upon receipt of the notes of the inaugural meeting of the WLGA's Fire Services' Panel that copies of the notes be circulated to all Executive Panel members and, subject to the wording of the notes;***
- ii. that the Chairman raise the issue of the proposed composition of the WLGA Fire Services' Panel at its next meeting, and;***
- iii. if necessary that a letter be sent to the Association registering North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's disappointment with the Fire Services' Panel's decision in relation to the constitution of the Panel membership and to the method by which the decision had been taken in the absence of the majority of the political representatives. The letter should reiterate North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's views on the constitution of the membership of the WLGA's Fire Services' Panel and request that the membership be expanded to include other elected members in addition to the chairs and vice-chairs of each authority.***

In relation to the Wales Fire and Rescue Advisory Committee, Panel members were informed by the Chairman that the Minister had made it known that she would welcome observers from each authority to attend Committee meetings. The Chairman advised the Panel that it was his intention to invite members to accompany him to future meetings.

Page 3, Statement by the Wales Audit Office (WAO): Councillor J A MacLennan noted his disappointment at the WAO's failure to complete the audit of the Authority's Accounts on time. The Chief Fire Officer explained that all the required amendments had now been agreed and that the final Statement of Accounts would be presented to the Authority at its meeting on 19th December 2005. A representative from the WAO would also be present at that meeting to present their findings and opinions.

Page 5, Letters to Ministers: the Clerk confirmed that a letter had been sent to the relevant Ministers highlighting the difficulties encountered by the Authority in setting its budget as a result of the Assembly Government's delay in issuing draft guidance for consultation and in bringing forward legislation. A consultation on Service Standards had recently been commenced and a statement on the issue would be made by the Chief Fire Officer under "Urgent Matters".

Page 7, Item 10, Proposed Restructure of Police Forces and Authorities: the Panel was advised by the Chief Fire Officer that the letter of response to the Assembly's Social Justice and Regeneration Committee's consultation on the "Restructuring of Constabulary" had been issued as drafted. Even though the letter had been drafted with the intention of not offering an opinion either in favour of amalgamation, or the retention of the status quo, in relation to the structure of police forces and authorities, there appeared to be a lack of clarity amongst Assembly officials and the media as to the Authority's position.

5) Integrated Risk Management Plan – Third Year Action Plan

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) Paul Claydon introduced his report and the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) third year Action Plan (previously circulated) to the Panel. Following and in-depth discussion at the earlier meeting of the IRMP Working Group and the acceptance of the amendments tabled, members:

Resolved unanimously: – to

- i. note the contents of the report;**
- ii. to approve the IRMP draft third year Action Plan as drafted, pending the inclusion of the following items:**
 - a) that when the aerial ladder platform vehicle, currently based at Bangor Fire Station, reached the end of its operational life that the Service operates with a fleet of three aerial appliances; the three appliances being based at Bangor, Rhyl and Wrexham, and that a 30 minute attendance standard be adopted for these appliances;**
 - b) that the Service enters into co-responding trials with the Welsh Ambulance Service, with trials being undertaken at Porthmadog, Barmouth and Harlech fire stations. These trials also to form part of an in-depth feasibility study which would explore the impact the provision of a co-responding service had on the Authority's**

- resources and an evaluation of the benefits to the public and the Service of the provision of a co-responding service; and*
- iii. *to recommend to the Fire and Rescue Authority, at its meeting on 19th December 2005, that it approves the IRMP draft third year action plan for public consultation.*

6) Urgent Matters

“Service Standards for Attendance to Fires in the Home and Risk Reduction Planning Guidance for the Fire and Rescue Authorities”: A copy of the Welsh Assembly Government's Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration's letter, dated 30th November 2005, was distributed to members at the meeting. Members were informed by the Chief Fire Officer that the consultation document itself did not contain any specific references to attendance times. As stated in the letter the emphasis was on attaining an appropriate balance between proactive activity and reactive responses. The Chief Fire Officer informed the Panel that he intended to compile a draft response, on the Authority's behalf, which would be tabled at the Authority's meeting on 19th December 2005 for members' consideration. He emphasised that it would not be in the Authority's interest to sign up to any standards that were unachievable. Therefore it would be important for the Authority to study in detail the proposals when they were eventually published. Due to Wales' diverse geography and the location of the main population centres, the setting of one common Service Standard, which would be applied across the whole country would be impractical and unachievable, unless different standards were set for different areas.

7) Date(s) of future meetings

Panel members were informed by the Chairman that it was his intention to discuss and set the dates for the IRMP Working Group and the Executive Panel's next meetings during the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting on 19th December 2005.

The Chairman informed members that it was recommended that the remaining items of business on the meeting's agenda be discussed without the public or Press present. It was:

Resolved: - pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because it was likely that there would be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 8, 9 and 10 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

All officers apart from the Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Clerk, Treasurer and Member Liaison Officer left the meeting at this juncture.

PART II

8) Urgent Matter

IRMP – Draft Third Year Action Plan: The Chairman informed the Panel that in response to a request, he had agreed that further discussion could take place on the proposed locations for the three ALPs that would remain in service under the Authority's IRMP draft third year action plan. In reply to a question members were advised that if the proposed location for one of the ALPs was changed from a fire station operating the wholetime duty system to a fire station operating the day-crewing duty system the Authority would realise further savings of approximately £50k. Following a discussion the Panel:

Resolved: - to confirm that its recommendation on the locations for the ALPs under the proposals contained in the Authority's IRMP Draft Third Year Action Plan remain as Bangor, Rhyl and Wrexham.

9) Personnel Issue

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced his confidential report (circulated at the meeting) advising members of an opportunity to realign roles and responsibilities and to create a post of Assistant Chief Officer Finance and Procurement. The creation of this post would enhance the Authority's strategic financial and procurement provision. He proceeded to explain that the proposal to create the new post had emanated from a review recently undertaken into the corporate services function. The creation of the new post would require the removal of the two current posts of Assistant Chief Officer (Corporate Services) and Support Services Manager. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer outlined to the Panel the roles and responsibilities of the current postholders and, following a reallocation of responsibilities and a re-alignment of roles, the expectations of the new post in relation to providing comprehensive financial performance information to the Authority as a basis for its strategic decision making. Members were given a detailed explanation by the Treasurer of the financial implications to the Authority of this restructuring exercise. He also advised the Panel that provision for the financial consequences of the re-structuring proposal had been built into the Authority's draft budget for 2006/07. Assurances were given to the Panel by both the Chairman and Deputy Chief Fire Officer that the current incumbents of both posts had been fully briefed on the proposals being presented to members and were aware of the details of the redundancy packages that would be offered to them if the proposals were approved. They also fully understood that, although they had agreed in principle to accept the terms and conditions of the packages on offer, the matter was at the discretion of the Authority and that there was no guarantee of approval.

In reply to members' questions officers confirmed that both posts were non-uniformed local government posts. Both officers had in excess of 30 years' service each and had been exemplary employees of the Authority. Councillor E C George felt that the report should have contained information on issues such

as the number of years' service both individuals had attained to date, along with their intended date of retirement, so that members would be better placed to make a balanced judgement on what was best for the Authority. The Chief Fire Officer assured members that given the current managerial climate there was a need for the Authority to re-align roles and responsibilities at this moment in time rather than at a future date. The Clerk confirmed to members that, under the powers delegated to it by the Authority, decisions on use of powers under the pension scheme fall to the Executive Panel. Given the seniority of the new post, an appointment panel drawn from the Executive Panel would be convened in line with the usual arrangements. Following a discussion it was:

Resolved: - that

- i. a post of Assistant Chief Officer Finance and Procurement be established;***
- ii. the post of Support Services Manager be made redundant with effect from 1st April 2006;***
- iii. the post of Assistant Chief Officer (Corporate Services) be made redundant with effect from 1st June 2006; and***
- iv. the Authority's early voluntary retirement/redundancy and its discretionary powers under the 'Local Government – Discretionary Payments (Amendments) Regulations 1999' policies be utilised in the case of the posts to be removed from the establishment on the basis reported.***

Meeting concluded at 1pm.

The above minutes, pending any inclusions shown, are approved as a true and correct record of proceedings.

Signed: I Roberts

Dated: 13 March, 2006