

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the Executive Panel meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Tuesday 12th December 2006 at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, St. Asaph. Meeting commenced at 9.35am.

Present:

Councillor

T Roberts (Chairman)
E C George (Vice-Chairman)

J M Vaughan
S Frobisher
J A Smith
E Morgan Jones
W T Owen
W J Chorlton
J A Roberts

Representing

Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council

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

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); A Wright (Acting Monitoring Officer to the Authority); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); P S Claydon (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery); C Hanks (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Support); D Docx (Assistant Chief Officer, Finance and Procurement); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); W A Murphy (Senior Operations Manager); K Hughes (Senior Safety Manager); D G Roberts (Retained Duty System Project Manager); L Roberts (Fire Control Manager); A Edwards (Denbighshire County Safety Manager); Stephen Roberts (Head of Facilities Management Department) and Rh Evans (Member Liaison Officer).

PART I

1) Apologies

Councillor

S C Jones
D Barratt
E F Evans
G M Craddock
M Williams

I R Miller

Representing

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

Clerk and Monitoring Officer

J Kennedy
C Enness

Deputy Monitoring Officer
Deputy Chief Fire Officer

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Alison Wright, the Acting Monitoring Officer, to her first meeting.

2) Notice of Urgent Matters

Members were informed by the Chairman that no items had been submitted to him or the Clerk for consideration.

3) Minutes

The following minutes were submitted:

- i. Executive Panel meeting held on 21st September 2006.
- ii. Executive Panel meeting held on 9th October 2006

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

4) Matters Arising

The following matters arose from the minutes:

Executive Panel 21st September 2006:

Page 2 – Matters Arising, Co-responding: The Chief Fire Officer reminded members that the High Court had ruled in favour of the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) in the case brought by the Union against Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Authorities in relation to co-responding and in particular to the contractual arrangements of the 2003 Pay and Conditions of Service Agreement. Although the judge had indicated that there was very little chance of an appeal being successful both authorities had, nevertheless, since lodged an appeal against the High Court judgement. Members were advised that, similar to the original proceedings, it was likely that the Authority would be approached for a contribution towards the appeal costs. The Chairman advised that a date in February 2007 had been set for the appeal hearing and that he had been led to understand that the appeal would be a fixed costs appeal. Members indicated their willingness for the Authority to contribute a set amount towards the appeal costs. In reply to a request from Councillor W J Chorlton that the Authority considers the local Ambulance Service's situation in North Wales before it proceeds with co-responding trials in the area, the Chief Fire Officer advised that these pilots were currently on hold pending the outcome of the High Court case and the appeal. It was:

Resolved: -

- i. that North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority should not proceed with the scheduled co-responding trials until the outcome of Nottinghamshire and*

Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Authorities' appeal against the High Court judgement in relation to the contractual arrangements of the 2003 Pay and Conditions of Service Agreement is known; and

- ii. if the Authority is approached by the NJC for a contribution towards the above authorities' costs in relation to lodging the appeal, that the Authority would be willing to contribute up to a maximum of £2,000 towards those costs.*

9.50am Councillor J A Roberts entered the meeting at this point.

Page 5 - Item 8, Determination of efficiency savings within 2006/07 to cover rank

to role assimilation: In reply to a question from Councillor W J Chorlton on the rank to role process members were advised by the Chairman that a report on the subject was to be presented to the Authority at its meeting on 18th December 2006.

5) Fire and Rescue Service Budget 2007/08

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) introduced her report (previously circulated) which presented members with the background against which the Authority had been required to draft its revenue and capital budget for 2007/08. She explained that the draft budget, due to be presented to the Authority at its meeting on 18th December 2006, had been drawn up taking into consideration a number of different factors. These included an anticipated average increase in the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) of 3.85% across North Wales, the efficiency savings required by central government, the new accounting method for the Firefighters' Pension Scheme from April 2007 and the uncertainty surrounding the amount of the pay award due to be awarded to firefighters from 1st July 2007. An additional component which had to be factored in to the 2007/08 budget was the fact that retained firefighters would be eligible to join the new Firefighters' Pension Scheme from April 2007. This posed an element of uncertainty in the budget setting process as, at present, there was no way of anticipating the take-up level from amongst retained personnel for joining the Scheme and consequently the cost implications to the Authority. The Treasurer informed members that with a view to easing any possible monetary impact created by this uncertainty, provision had been made within the draft budget towards possible contributions on behalf of retained employees into the new Scheme. He proceeded to explain that the underspend from the current year had been disregarded for the purpose of setting the 2007/08 budget as the Authority needed to break the cycle of relying on previous years' underspends to underpin the following year's budget. In previous years part of the underspend had been allocated to the Authority's Pension Provision, but as the financing arrangements for the Pension Scheme was due to change in April 2007 there was a proposal to return some of the Provision money to the constituent authorities. This proposal was the subject of a separate report on the current meeting's agenda. Members were advised by the Treasurer that, due to a complex set of changes which included the impact of firefighters' pensions, the Authority would be asked to approve a budget for

2007/08 that had very limited capacity for growth. As a result any new projects would have to be self-financing. The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) informed members that the Risk Reduction Planning (RRP) process was effectively the start of the budget setting process. Therefore the next round of RRP Working Group meetings, due to commence in early 2007, would be the start of the budget setting process for 2008/09 as the Authority's aims, priorities and efficiencies would be identified, approved and implemented through the RRP process. It was:

Resolved: - to note the contents of the report and that the budget setting process for future years be built into the Risk Reduction Planning process with discussions on draft budget proposals and on efficiency savings being debated at Executive Panel meetings in advance of the Authority's December meeting.

6) Pension Contingency issues and the constituent authorities

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) which, in response to the Authority's request at its meeting on 23rd October 2006, detailed the financial amounts which could be returned from the Fire and Rescue Authority's Pension Provision to the constituent authorities. He explained that the report detailed the current Provision balance held, included an estimate of the amount that would need to be retained to fund possible future pension liabilities, specified the recommended amount to be retained for additional setting up costs for any future Tri-Service Control Room and the amounts that could be repaid to each of the constituent authorities based on the 2004 mid-year population figures. In his view a total amount of £1 million could be repaid to the constituent authorities. Details of the proposed repayable amounts had been circulated to the treasurers of the constituent authorities and, to date, no objections had been received regarding the proposed repayment figures. In reply to a question on whether the amount retained by the Authority would be sufficient, if needed, to cover all costs relating to the rank to role assimilation process the Treasurer advised that the Pension Provision money actually belonged to the constituent authorities and that the rank to role process was meant to be self-financing. It was:

Resolved: - to recommend to the Fire and Rescue Authority, at its meeting on 18th December, that it:

- i. should retain £665,000 of the Pension Provision for future pension liabilities;***
- ii. that £127,000 of the Pension Provision should be used to fund the set up costs of the Tri-Service Control, if it is agreed that the scheme will go ahead;***
and
- iii. that £1,000,000 of the Pension Provision is repaid to the constituent authorities.***

7) Urgent Matters

None.

8) Date(s) of future meetings

The Chief Fire Officer informed members that the Authority would soon need to commence its RRP process for 2008/09. He was also of the view that the RRP Working Group could make more effective use of its time by, whenever possible, not holding its meetings on the same day as Executive Panel meetings. It was anticipated that the RRP Working Group would need to meet on a monthly basis between January and April 2007. Following a discussion members:

Resolved: - that the next Executive Panel meeting be held on Wednesday 24th January 2007 with the RRP Working Group's next meeting being held on Tuesday 30th January 2007. Both meetings to commence at 10am and to be held at Fire and Rescue Service's Headquarters, St. Asaph.

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.

PART II

9) "FireFirst" – Rhyl Community Fire Station Project

Prior to introducing his report the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) introduced Mr Alyn Edwards, the Service's County Safety Manager for the Denbighshire area, to members. Mr Edwards then gave members a presentation on the "FireFirst" – Rhyl Community Fire Station Project. In his presentation Mr Edwards outlined the background to the project, the research work undertaken by the Project Board which included visits to various types of community fire stations across the UK, details of the partnerships forged with various agencies and organisations within Denbighshire which had shown an interest in using the facilities that would be available, and details of the engagement process with the local community during the open day at the station. By means of presentation slides members were able to see the facilities and resources that would be available to staff and the general public at the new station, an artist's impression of what the proposed fire station would look like when built and the floor plans for the station.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) then presented his report (previously circulated) which provided the Panel with a further update on the project. In addition to the details about the funding streams already secured towards the project the report also set out the timetable for the construction

programme. Following the Panel's last meeting on 9th October 2006 the Chairman had written to the Welsh Assembly Government's (WAG) Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration to seek confirmation of the amount of grant funding the Government was willing to award towards the project. A copy of the Minister's reply was attached to the report. In it she said that the WAG was "formally offer[ing] financial support up to a maximum of £400,000 towards the project" from its Community Fire Safety Budget. Prior to the meeting confirmation had been received from the WAG's Department for Enterprise, Innovation and Networks (which had taken over the functions of the Welsh Development Agency (WDA)) that it was willing to support the project and award it an Environmental and Town Improvement Grant towards external building work. Work was currently underway to compile bids for funding from other sources. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) also detailed to the Panel the financial implications to the Authority of abandoning the community fire station project at this stage and just proceeding with the refurbishment of the fire station. If such a decision was taken the grant funding would not be available as the community element of the project would have been withdrawn.

Councillor J A Smith, a member of the Project Board, thanked everyone involved with the project for their hard work. He emphasised the importance of the project to Rhyl and to North Wales as a whole. In his view this type of facility would assist the Service in engaging with the vulnerable and hard to reach sections of the community. The numbers that had attended the open day testified to the local community's hopes and aspirations for the project. If this project proved to be successful similar facilities could then be established across North Wales, as and when stations were refurbished and dependent upon local needs.

Councillor J Vaughan acknowledged the work that had gone into this project but stressed that she still had reservations about the project's economic viability and its long term sustainability, particularly in view of the fact that the majority of the interested parties and organisations listed as potential users of the facilities seemed to be either registered charities or local government agencies. These sentiments were echoed by Councillor W J Chorlton. In response to these comments the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) advised the Panel that it was extremely difficult to gauge the level of interest and possible outside organisations' take-up before the facility had been given the go-ahead. The Vice-Chairman was of the view that the project should be supported as the staff facilities were in dire need of refurbishment and upgrading. This view was supported by Councillor J A Roberts. On being put to the vote, by a majority, it was:

Resolved: - to recommend to the Fire and Rescue Authority at its next meeting that:

- i. it approves the funding of this project in the sum of £2.482 million to enable competitive tenders to be sought from building contractors;***

- ii. it confirms that Option 2 is the preferred funding option; and*
- iii. the report presented to the Authority on 18th December 2006 includes an estimate of the running costs for the community side of the project.*

10) Tri-Service Control

The Chief Fire Officer gave the Panel a verbal update on the current position regarding the establishment of a Tri-Service Control room. Members were advised that the WAG was in favour of a tri-service control centre for North Wales but that it seemed, at present, that there was still some reluctance on the part of officers and politicians from the Health Service and Ambulance Services NHS Trust to support the project. The Minister had recently indicated that she was optimistic that a resolution would eventually be found to the matter.

The Chief Fire Officer also advised members of his intention to bring a report to the Panel at its next meeting on issues relating to the location of the Service's secondary control room and its link up facilities with the 'Firelink' communications system.

Meeting concluded at 11.20am.

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

Signed: T Roberts

Dated: 24 January, 2007