

**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

Minutes of the Executive Panel meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> July 2007 at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, St. Asaph. Meeting commenced at 10.30am.

**Present:**

**Councillor**

**Representing**

T Roberts (Chairman)

Gwynedd Council

E C George (Vice-Chairman)

Wrexham County Borough Council

J A MacLennan

Conwy County Borough Council

J M Vaughan

Conwy County Borough Council

J A Smith

Denbighshire County Council

D Barratt

Flintshire County Council

E F Evans

Flintshire County Council

E Morgan Jones

Gwynedd Council

W T Owen

Gwynedd Council

M Williams

Wrexham County Borough Council

W J Chorlton

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); S Forrest (Treasurer's Department Conwy County Borough Council); C Enness (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); 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); K Hughes (Senior Fire Safety Manager); L Roberts (Fire Control Manager); R Fairhead (Chief Officer's Advisory Team Support Manager); S Roberts (Head of Facilities Management) and Rh Evans (Member Liaison Officer).

**PART I**

**1) Apologies**

**Councillor**

**Representing**

S Frobisher

Denbighshire County Council

G M Craddock

Wrexham County Borough Council

J A Roberts

Ynys Môn County Council

K W Finch

Treasurer to the Authority

## **2) Notice of Urgent Matters**

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

The Chairman informed the Panel that both he and the Chief Fire Officer had received letters from the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer of South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority thanking the Authority and Service personnel from North Wales for their "invaluable assistance" with the relief work following the recent flooding incidents in the area. The estimated cost of the assistance provided by North Wales Fire and Rescue Service currently stood at approximately £30k. Discussions were underway with South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority regarding reimbursement of these costs. However, it was unlikely that reimbursement would be received in the near future as South Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Authority would have to await the outcome of its application for assistance under the Bellwin Scheme before it would be in a position to repay these costs.

The Panel was advised that, in the meantime, one member of staff from North Wales had been deployed to the Tewkesbury area to survey the flooding situation that was developing in Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire. During the meeting, the Panel was informed by the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) that he had received information that a crew from Llandudno Fire Station had been dispatched to the Tewkesbury area to assist with the flood relief efforts. It was likely that the crew would be involved in the effort to safeguard an electricity sub-station from the flood water.

Members were reassured by the Chief Fire Officer that North Wales Fire and Rescue Service was adequately equipped to deal with water rescue situations similar to those seen recently in other parts of the UK. Due to the unpredictable nature of extreme weather conditions there could never be a full guarantee that all possible scenarios could be handled as this would be dependent upon the scale of the weather event.

## **3) Minutes**

The following minutes were submitted:

- i. Executive Panel meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2007

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

## **4) Matters Arising**

The following matter arose from the minutes submitted:

**Pages 2 and 3, 'Proposals for the Draft Risk Reduction Plan 2008/09':** members were advised that delivery of the published version of the Draft Risk Reduction Plan (RRP) Action Plan 2008/09 consultation document was expected that day. On receipt copies would be distributed to all consultees, including Fire and Rescue Authority members. A copy of the consultation document had been available on the Authority's website since shortly after the Fire and Rescue Authority's meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2007. In reply to a question from Councillor W J Chorlton officers advised the Panel that the consultation process was already underway. Earlier that week middle and supervisory managers had been given a presentation on the consultants' findings and the consequential changes proposed to the rostering procedures for firefighters on Wholetime and Day-crewed stations. In addition the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) was undertaking a visit to each wholetime and day-crewed station to explain these proposals to personnel and to answer their questions. Members were assured that no decision had yet been made on how accrued 'reserve hours' would be utilised. Such a decision would not be taken until the conclusion of the consultation process. Members were advised by the Clerk to seek officers' guidance if they were unsure of any of the facts when approached by personnel.

## **5) Locating Dual Role Appliances**

Prior to the commencement of the meeting members had been given the opportunity to view a Dual Role Appliance, a Land Rover and a frontline fire appliance. Service personnel had been on hand to answer members' questions during the viewing.

At the outset of this business item the Chairman informed the Panel that, although he had reservations about some of the data contained in the report, he would not be taking a major role in the discussion. He proceeded to explain that he would reserve his right to question the information provided until the Authority's meeting in October, by which time he would be in possession of the results of an acquaintance's research into the facts and figures which he was querying. The Clerk enquired which facts and figures caused concern to the Chairman so that officers may also have the opportunity to scrutinise the information.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) then introduced his and the Monitoring Officer's joint report and appendices (previously circulated) which provided the supplementary information requested by the Authority, at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2007, that would enable the Executive Panel to formulate a recommendation for the Fire and Rescue Authority in relation to the location of the tenth dual role appliance in North Wales. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation and handouts (copies of the maps contained in the handouts were also on display in the meeting room) the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) gave members an overview of the process that had been followed to determine the most advantageous locations for stationing the dual role appliances in order to achieve optimum coverage across the whole North Wales

area within 30 minutes of mobilisation. The analytical tool used for this process was the Fire Service Emergency Cover (FSEC) Model, the preferred analytical tool of the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and the UK Government's Communities and Local Government (CLG) Department. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) explained that following the Fire and Rescue Authority's decision on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2007 the data relating to the Barmouth and Dolgellau areas had been re-interrogated to ensure its robustness. Members were assured that population details, taken from the 2001 UK Census, were an integral part of the process undertaken. In addition to population data the FSEC Model, which had taken over 18 months to develop, had been populated with, amongst other data, Ordnance Survey mapping information, vehicle speeds based on road classification, and current road network information as supplied by local authorities and the WAG. The latter took into account all known long-term infrastructure problems such as weak bridges and areas of narrow access.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) proceeded to detail the information contained in the report and the associated appendices. In order to reassure members that the original proposal to locate the dual role appliance at Dolgellau had been based on thoroughly researched evidence he showed members a map which detailed the entire area dual role appliances based at Barmouth, Dolgellau and Porthmadog could reach within 30 minutes. By locating a dual role appliance at Dolgellau and Porthmadog the Service would be able to reach the majority of the area an appliance based at Barmouth could reach within the 30 minute attendance time.

Councillor J Vaughan reminded members that it was important to note that the primary purpose of the dual role appliance vehicle was to assist with fighting grass and gorse fires and that all stations which housed a dual role appliance would also have a frontline fire appliance. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) stressed that although dual role appliances had the capability to deal with small house fires a front line appliance would always be mobilised to these types of incidents.

Councillor E Morgan Jones registered his concern about the facts relating to the number of dwellings shown, in an area with which he was familiar, on the map in Appendix 2 to the report. Replying to members' questions the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that caravan parks were not considered to be high risk sites, mainly because of the fact that the registration requirements for these types of sites were governed by robust legislation. In relation to the wisdom of using 2001 Census population figures as a basis for current population figures, and the fact that these figures did not take into account the seasonal population influx in this particular area of North Wales, officers advised that the majority of public bodies and organisations based population figures on the latest available Census data as it was widely accepted as being the most reliable information available. Also, as far as officers were aware, no analytical methodology took account of transient population movements.

The Vice-Chairman registered his disappointment that the Monitoring Officer had chosen to include his advice to the Panel in the body of the report rather than to communicate it to members verbally at the meeting. In his opinion this had drawn the Press' attention to the matter. Another member echoed this view. Responding to this point the Clerk advised members that his primary duty as Monitoring Officer was to safeguard the Authority's interests. He agreed that oral advice may be sufficient in the majority of cases, but on other occasions circumstances merited including the advice in the report itself. After giving careful consideration to the circumstances surrounding this case, particularly the weight given to a representation made in response to the public consultation exercise which had not been received until some considerable time after the close of the actual consultation period, the Monitoring Officer had concluded that the importance of the advice which he wanted to impart to members warranted its inclusion in the report itself in order to alert them to the risks to which the Authority could be exposed if a certain course of action was followed. If he did not draw members' attention to such issues he would be failing in his duties to the Authority. It would then be up to members whether or not to heed his advice.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman on whether one of the current fleet of Land Rovers could be retained and stationed at Barmouth, or if a surplus appliance could be stationed there as a support appliance, officers advised that the Land Rovers were approaching the end of their operational life and that the Service did not possess any surplus appliances.

Following an in-depth discussion Councillor W J Chorlton, seconded by Councillor E F Evans proposed that, based on the evidence provided, the Panel recommend the Fire and Rescue Authority at its meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007 that the tenth dual role appliance be based at Dolgellau. The Vice-Chairman proposed an amendment to this proposal, that the Executive Panel recommend to the Fire and Rescue Authority that it approves Dolgellau as the location for the tenth dual role appliance, but that a surplus appliance be stationed at Barmouth as a support appliance. The amendment was seconded by Councillor E Morgan Jones. The amendment was voted upon first and on being put to the vote it was lost. On being put to the vote the original proposal was carried by a majority. Therefore, members:

***Resolved: - based on the information in the report and its associated appendices to recommend to the Fire and Rescue Authority at its meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007 to approve that the tenth dual role appliance be based at Dolgellau fire station.***

The Chairman abstained from voting on both the amendment and the proposal.

## **6) Budget Prospects for 2008/09**

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) introduced her report (previously circulated) which presented members with the early indication they

had requested of the known budget pressures for 2008/09 and beyond. She explained that it was not possible to quantify all of the pressures at this early stage but, where possible, the anticipated pressures had been included in order to give members an early indication of the pressures that lay ahead in the next financial year and to assist them with the strategic planning process. The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) then proceeded to detail the contents of her report. She explained that the financial pressures list, which appeared in paragraph 7 of her report, was by no means exhaustive. It should also be noted that all of the pressures listed, with the exception of the increase in community safety work, were external pressures imposed on fire and rescue authorities either by legislative requirements or central government directives.

No money had been set-aside during the current financial year to finance the employer's contributions for Retained Duty System (RDS) staff that had opted to join the Firefighters' Pension Scheme. As 120 RDS staff had opted to join the Scheme, £148k required to be found within this year's budget to finance the employer's contributions. It was estimated that an additional £50k would be required in 2008/09 to finance the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) following the Scheme's revaluation in the autumn of 2007.

Fire and rescue authorities were still awaiting announcements from the WAG regarding supplementary funding for the 'Firelink' Radio Project, Resilience work to Control Rooms and future maintenance costs for New Dimensions assets and equipment. The latter subject had been raised by the Chairman and Chief Fire Officer during a recent meeting with Mr Andrew Davies AM, the then WAG Minister with responsibility for fire and rescue services. The Chief Fire Officer informed members that the three Welsh fire and rescue authorities and the WAG were exploring, as a contingency measure, the option of utilising each other's control rooms as back-up control rooms in the event of a control room failure in one or both of the other Service areas.

The increase in community safety work, which stemmed from the recommendations of the Chief Fire Officer's Task Group report into the high number of fire related deaths in North Wales, would eventually be financed from efficiencies within the Service. Unfortunately these efficiency gains would take approximately 2 years to be realised. Therefore, in the interim and with a view to delivering the proposals the Authority had included in its draft RRP Action Plan for 2008/09, an additional £750k required to be found in the next financial year to deliver this proposal.

12.10pm Councillor W T Owen left the meeting at this juncture.

In reply to questions officers advised that the complexity of employment law and human resource (HR) issues, especially under the modernisation agenda, now required specialist legal advice to be sought on a more frequent basis. Inevitably this incurred extra expenditure. Due to budgetary constraints all posts which now became vacant were being referred to the Chief Fire Officer for permission to recruit. Members requested that future reports include details of

efficiencies that could be achieved with a view to mitigating budgetary pressures:

**Resolved:** -

- i. to note the cost pressures as listed in the report and the consequential impact on the provisional budget as mentioned in paragraph 5 of the report; and***
- ii. that future reports include details of efficiency savings that could be achieved for the purpose of offsetting known budgetary pressures.***

**7) Presentation on Legislative Competence Order – Installation of Domestic Sprinklers**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced this item of business and informed the Panel that Mrs Ann Jones AM had recently been successful in a ballot relating to Legislative Competence Orders (LCOs) in the Assembly. He proceeded to explain that a LCO was a new mechanism under the Government of Wales Act 2006 under which the Assembly could request to acquire legislative powers from the UK Parliament in certain areas where responsibilities for those functions were already devolved. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave the Panel a brief overview of the LCO process before informing members that the subject of Mrs Jones' LCO was an amendment to the Housing Act 2004 which would make the installation of automatic fire sprinkler systems mandatory in all new-build domestic properties in Wales from 2010 onwards. Members were informed by the Chief Fire Officer that the principal officers of all three fire and rescue services in Wales had agreed to support Mrs Jones' proposal, as had other stakeholders. They had all agreed to work with her to achieve her aim, with North Wales Fire and Rescue Service being the lead Service advising her on the issue. In order to secure the amendment a considerable amount of work would be required before the amendment was debated at Plenary on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2007. Therefore Mrs Jones had been invited to address the Champions Working Group at their next meeting on 7<sup>th</sup> September. On 13<sup>th</sup> September 2007 a media day had been arranged at St. Asaph fire station to highlight and promote the proposed amendment. If the amendment was approved by the Assembly at the Plenary session it would then be presented to the Secretary of State for Wales who would lay it before both Houses of Parliament and, if it received their approval, the transfer of powers would be made through Orders in Council

12.25pm Councillor W J Chorlton left the meeting at this juncture.

The Panel:

**Resolved:** - ***to note the information provided and to support the proposed Domestic Fire Safety Legislative Competence Order.***

12.30pm: The Chairman, Councillors J Vaughan and M Williams left the meeting at this juncture and the Vice-Chairman took the chair for the remainder of the meeting.

## **8) Review of Statutory Appointments and Service Level Agreements**

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) reminded members that the Fire and Rescue Authority at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2007 had delegated the task of undertaking the review of the statutory appointments of Monitoring Officer and Treasurer to the Fire and Rescue Authority and the service level agreements for the provision of legal services and Firefighters' Pension Scheme services, due to expire on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008, to the Executive Panel. She outlined the process followed the last time the appointments and agreements had been reviewed. Members:

### **Resolved: - that**

- i. the Chief Fire Officer should seek expressions of interest from individuals and authorities interested in undertaking the statutory roles of Treasurer and Monitoring Officer to the Authority, and for the provision of legal advice and Firefighters' Pension Scheme services to the Authority; and***
- ii. following this exercise submit a report to the Executive Panel, at its meeting prior to December's meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority, detailing his recommendations in relation to the statutory appointments and the provision of services under service level agreements from April 2008.***

## **9) Performance Monitoring**

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) introduced her report (previously circulated) providing members with information relating to the Service's performance against the various set performance indicators (PIs) during the first quarter of the 2007/08 reporting year. The information contained in the report related to the period between 1<sup>st</sup> April and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2007. She drew members' attention to a number of areas listed within the report. These included the statistics relating to the number of smoke alarms fitted and which had activated in the course of a fire, which were extremely encouraging and were an early indication that the Authority, and the general public, were starting to reap the benefits of the additional community fire safety (CFS) work that had been undertaken. It was also encouraging to report that, to date this year, no life had been lost in an accidental dwelling fire in North Wales. Although the number of injuries sustained in dwelling fires was showing an increase on the previous year's figure it was on a par with the figures for the same period in 2005/06. It was disappointing to report that the number of accidental dwelling fires was slightly higher than for the same period the previous year. The number of deliberate secondary fires was a cause for concern as it was registering an increase of 10% on the previous year's figure. The figures also indicated that a pattern seemed to be emerging which showed that these types of incidents peaked on a four monthly cycle, which could indicate an underlying



contributory factor. Whilst the figures for the number of malicious false alarms received, attended and not attended encouragingly showed a decrease, it was still disappointing to report that the number of false alarms from both domestic and non-domestic automatic fire alarm (AFA) systems was continuing to increase. In reply to a question from Councillor J A Smith on how officers were progressing in their discussions with NHS staff with a view to reducing the number of false alarms from AFA systems in health establishments, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) informed members that the Working Group, whose membership comprised of representatives from the Service, NHS and educational establishments, was expected to present a policy to the Service for approval before the end of September. This policy would outline how these establishments would drive down the number of false alarms from AFAs to a point where, if systems persistently false alarm, activations would be required to be followed up by a 999 call confirming a fire.

It was also encouraging to report that the levels of sickness absences were generally decreasing and that the number of undisputed invoices paid within 30 days was on the increase. Members:

**Resolved: - to note the contents of the performance monitoring report.**

#### **10) Extensions of Sick Pay**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced his report (previously circulated) informing members of the decisions taken by the Chief Fire Officer, following consultation with the Chairman, in respect of the granting of extensions of sick pay. Members:

**Resolved: - to note the report**

#### **11) Urgent Matters**

None.

#### **12) Date(s) of future meetings**

As a number of members had left the meeting it was decided that the Member Liaison Officer should consult with the Chairman and Principal Officers to set the date for the Executive Panel's next meeting and advise all concerned accordingly.

The Chair of the meeting informed members that it was recommended that the remaining item 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 item 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**

The report submitted under Part II business had been classed as exempt from disclosure under paragraph 14 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

### **13) Update on Capital Projects**

Prior to the commencement of this business item Wrexham County Borough Council representatives were reminded by the Clerk of the need for them to declare an interest in this item of business due to the information it contained relating to the proposal to relocate Wrexham fire station. They were advised that they could participate in any debate on the matter but should not take part in any vote on the issue. Councillor E C George declared an interest in the matter.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) then proceeded to introduce his report (previously circulated) updating members on the Facilities Management Department's capital programme. He detailed various aspects of the Capital Programme before the Head of Facilities Management briefed members on recent developments relating to the plans for the fire station and County Safety Office site at Llangefni. It was:

**Resolved: - to note the contents of the report**

Meeting concluded at 12.45pm.