

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 15th December 2008 at Council Chamber, Guildhall, Wrexham. Meeting commenced at 10.30am.

PRESENT

Councillor	Representing
T Roberts (Chairman)	Gwynedd Council
D Barratt	Flintshire County Council
B Blackmore	Wrexham County Borough Council
M Ll Davies	Denbighshire County Council
R M Davies	Wrexham County Borough Council
B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
G C Evans	Denbighshire County Council
P C Evans	Conwy County Borough Council
T Evans	Wrexham County Borough Council
S Frobisher	Denbighshire County Council
E C George	Wrexham County Borough Council
M Griffith	Gwynedd Council
P Jeffares	Wrexham County Borough Council
A M Jones	Anglesey County Council
E M Jones	Gwynedd Council
D Mackie	Flintshire County Council
J V Owen	Anglesey County Council
W T Owen	Gwynedd County Council
W P Roberts	Conwy County Borough Council
M Thomas	Conwy County Borough Council
G O Williams	Gwynedd Council

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); C P Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); P Claydon (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Operational Assurance); D Docx (Assistant Chief Officer, Resources); R Simmons (Assistant Chief Officer, Organisational and People Development); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); W A Murphy (Senior Operations Manager); R Fairhead (Senior Fire Safety Manager); G Brandrick (Training and Development Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); L Roberts (Control Room Manager); I Williams (Executive Support Manager); C Dingle (Finance Manager); S Forrest (Accountant, Treasurer's Department, Conwy County Borough Council); R Powell (Wales Audit Office); K Smith (Firebrake); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer) and S Jones (Member Liaison Assistant).

PART I

APOLOGIES

Councillor

Representing

L W Davies	Anglesey County Council
G James	Flintshire County Council
N M Jones	Flintshire County Council
A Minshull	Flintshire County Council
R Peacock	Conwy County Borough Council
A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council

1 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

- 1.1 The Chairman advised that no items had been submitted to the Clerk for consideration.

2 MINUTES

- 2.1 The following minutes were submitted:

- i. Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 20th October 2008;

- 2.2 **RESOLVED to approve the minutes as a true and correct record of proceedings.**

- 2.3 The following minutes of the Executive Panel were submitted for information purposes:

- ii meeting held on 22nd September;
iii meeting held on 17th November 2008.

- 2.4 It was noted that the Executive Panel minutes for 17th November had not been formally adopted but were presented to the Authority as requested at the last meeting (minute 12.4 refers).

- 2.5 **RESOLVED to note the minutes.**

3 MATTERS ARISING

- 3.1 No matters arose from the minutes submitted.

4 APPOINTMENT OF A DEPUTY CHIEF OFFICER

- 4.1 The report was presented to inform Members of the outcome of the process to appoint a Deputy Chief Officer. Two candidates had applied and been interviewed and both were of extremely high quality.
- 4.2 Cllr George queried whether salaries, devolved administration and the Welsh language restricted the number of candidates applying for senior posts in the public services in Wales. From a NWFRS perspective, the Chief Fire Officer explained that the most likely cause for low number of applications was people's reluctance to move Brigades due to family commitments. The Clerk commented on trends in public sector recruitment and cited location, job appeal, career progression prospects, remuneration and terms and conditions, and reputation of the employment body as factors in market recruitment.
- 4.3 **Members supported the outcome of the interview process and congratulated Dawn Docx on her appointment.**

5 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

- 5.1 The Chairman presented his report on events and meetings that he and the Vice-Chairman had attended since the October meeting.
- 5.2 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

6 DRAFT BUDGET 2009-10

- 6.1 The report was presented to request Members to approve the draft budget for 2009-10.
- 6.2 The Treasurer introduced the paper and explained that the report contained proposals on the draft budget for 2009-10, the forecasts for 2010-11 and 2011-12.
- 6.3 It was noted that the rescheduling of the Loan Portfolio had resulted in a £78k savings in interests costs for 2009-10 and £35k in the current financial year.
- 6.4 The Treasurer explained the three options available for next year's budget. He did not recommend option 1; options 2 and 3 used provisions and underspends but were considered to be viable options. Under these two options there would be no impact on frontline services.
- 6.5 In response to a Member's question, it was noted that the remodelling of Betws y Coed and Deeside stations could be put on hold as no contracts had been signed for this work.

- 6.6 It was noted that there were ongoing discussions with the Assembly about Firelink. The Assembly would cover the cost for the first year, however, future years' funding had not yet been determined.
- 6.7 It was explained that the increased expenditure on agency fees was due to outsourcing work on employment law to deal with issues around discipline and grievances. More investigations and disciplinary actions were being conducted and a contract will soon be in place with North Wales Police so that they are able to undertake some of the work. Increased complexity in cases meant that there was a risk that the Service was not dealing with all the issues properly therefore these would now be outsourced wherever possible. This will mean a saving in officer time rather than money.
- 6.8 In response to a Member's question the Chief Fire Officer explained the fleet replacement programmes for vehicles and water tenders (fire engines). Fire engines are replaced on a 15-year replacement programme. The light vehicle replacement programme is kept under review but with the increase in community safety checks, additional vehicles are needed. However, wherever possible the number of vehicles were being kept to a minimum.
- 6.9 The Clerk informed Members of increasing concern about the dispersed and time limited manner in which community safety funding was made available by the Assembly; grant decisions were often announced relatively late, which made it difficult for partnerships to plan ahead with confidence and certainty.
- 6.10 **RESOLVED**
- (i) to approve the draft budget for 2009-10 based on the information provided in the report;**
 - (ii) that Constituent Authorities be advised of the provisional contributions required for 2009-10;**
 - (iii) to approve the draft capital programme for 2009-10 and associated methods of financing;**
 - (iv) to agree that if any changes transpired before 15 February 2009 which reduces the budget required, the powers for altering the budget level be delegated to the Chairman, Chief Fire Officer, Clerk and Treasurer.**

7 PROVISIONAL CAPITAL OUTTURN 2008/09

- 7.1 The report was submitted to provide Members with an estimated provisional capital outturn for the financial year 2008-2009.
- 7.2 Mrs Docx explained that revenue has to be spent within the year but capital funding could be rolled forward.
- 7.3 Cllr George raised an interest as a Wrexham Councillor and asked about any developments on Wrexham fire station. It was explained that the Wrexham

station project was currently on hold until other partners were ready to proceed. It was noted that a joint project was the best way forward and would be most beneficial to the community. A joint letter had been sent to the Assembly requesting that they allow the project to proceed but the response from the Minister had not been forthcoming.

7.4 It was proposed and seconded that the Chairs of the NWFRA, Welsh Ambulance Service and North Wales Police meet with the Minister to drive the project forward, but only at the appropriate time. The capital expenditure would also help to stimulate the local economy.

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

8 ANNUAL AUDIT LETTER 2007/08 AND REGULATORY PLAN 2008/09

8.1 Rob Powell from the Wales Audit Office presented the annual audit letter and regulatory plan to Members. Mr Powell thanked the Chief Fire Officer, Mrs Docx and her team for their assistance.

8.2 Mr Powell drew Members' attention to the following points:

- (i) some areas of the financial systems needed continued improvement;
- (ii) noted that a recording system for CFS checks would be in place by the end of 2009;
- (iii) the Authority has a good track record of operating within its revenue budget;
- (iv) financial pressures over the next few years included job evaluation and equal pay, Firelink and Long Term Capability Management;
- (v) issues around provisions and reserves;
- (vi) a priority for the Authority will be to implement the recommendations of the Chief Officer's Task Group to reduce the level of accidental fire deaths. This work is currently under way and is being monitored closely by the Chief Fire Officer;
- (vii) ensure that the Authority continues to develop its approach to effectively support the implementation of the Risk Reduction Plan. Noted that a working group has been established and is meeting on a regular basis, approximately every 3 weeks;
- (viii) noted that the Authority would be considering a report on scrutiny and audit arrangements later in the meeting
- (ix) the Authority is continuing to work towards the WLGA's Charter for Member Support and Development.

8.3 The Clerk had met with the clerks of the other FRAs and they had agreed that scrutiny arrangements needed to be tailored to suit FRA arrangements rather than trying to have the same systems as local authorities.

- 8.4 It was noted that the Authority has self-assessment tools to improve fleet management and continues to negotiate lower rates of purchase wherever possible.
- 8.5 In response to a Member's question it was confirmed that the audit and inspection fees could not be negotiated. However, in terms of accountability and transparency, Members felt that it would be useful to have a breakdown of the work undertaken to justify the cost. The Clerk advised that the fee was relatively low (to other public bodies) for the amount of work done based on risk.
- 8.6 Mr Powell then went on to the regulatory plan. The auditor will be undertaking work on efficiencies and regulations and will audit the improvement plan. There will be a focus on the work done in relation to the recommendations of the Chief Officers' Task Group Report.
- 8.7 The fee will be £54k plus VAT. A grant under WPI means some work will be free, eg asset management, buildings work under Making the Connections.
- 8.8 **RESOLVED to accept and note the Annual Audit Letter and Draft Regulatory Plan.**

9 FIREBRAKE WALES

- 9.1 Kim Smith, Chief Executive of Firebrake Wales provided information on the charity.
- 9.2 Firebrake works with the three FRAs in Wales and wants to ensure that it adds value to campaigns in the most effective way and can co-ordinate new activity where there are gaps and where an all Wales approach will be most effective. The charity's work is guided by priorities of the new *Fire Service Framework* and key priorities of the FRS Community Safety departments. In particular, its activities will target those most at risk from fire and those hardest to reach by conventional fire safety campaigns.
- 9.3 The charity is involved in a number of activities including -
- Co-ordination of the "Fire Flash" campaign, which in future will focus on promotion of Home Fire Safety Checks and smoke-alarm testing. The WAG grant for this work will be reduced by 2/3 next year so the charity will explore alternative sources of funding for this project.
 - A partnership with FRs, smoking-awareness charity ASH and public health to introduce "risk reduction" information to homes where people smoke. This will be subject to robust monitoring and evaluation to identify changes in behaviour which hopefully will result in fewer smoking-related home fires in Wales.

- A partnership with the FRSs and Lloyds TSB to promote a message of fire safety in the Christmas season to customers and staff.
- Facilitating the FRS Youth Engagement Forum of practitioners who work with young people throughout Wales to enable sharing of good practice and a Wales-wide approach to policy, accreditation of schemes and training of Fire Service staff.
- Involvement in a number of networks including the Joint Arson Group, Wales Council for Voluntary Action and the Wales Tobacco Control Alliance.

9.4 Firebrake is currently advertising for a policy and research officer and in future will focus on collecting and analysing available fire data in Wales to identify trends, draw in evidence of the most effective fire prevention strategies in Wales and beyond and will commission more evaluation and research to help inform policy and good practice.

9.5 The charity will continue to explore opportunities for attracting funding from a range of sources and is well placed to be commissioned to undertake specific fire safety and prevention activities that can be demonstrated to make an impact.

9.6 Firebrake will continue to look at initiatives that are most effective for Wales whilst recognizing there may be some initiatives that will work better locally.

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

10 CONSTITUTIONAL REVIEW

10.1 The report was presented to propose recommendations for the continuance of the Executive Panel and the formation of an Audit Committee as outcomes of the constitutional review.

10.2 The Clerk explained that as the Executive Panel does not have decision-making powers, but makes recommendations to the Authority, there is not such a great need for scrutiny as in unitary authorities. However, the need for an audit committee had been highlighted by the Wales Audit Office and endorsed by both the Clerk and the Treasurer as good practice.

10.3 The Chief Fire Officer expressed concern about the capacity of colleagues at Conwy to provide additional services to the Authority and that resources within the Service are currently at maximum capacity.

10.4 In response to a Member's question over the opportunity to challenge minutes of the Executive Panel, it was confirmed that it would be possible to do this via a call-in procedure if critical. Other Members expressed concern about the call-in procedure and it was suggested that if the Executive Panel

does make decisions that there is a period of 5-7 days for the Authority to consider and review them if needed.

10.5 **RESOLVED that**

- (i) the Executive Panel is retained and its terms of reference are re-adopted;
- (ii) if the Executive Panel makes decisions rather than recommendations, that there be an opportunity for the full Authority to consider and review them if needed within 5-7 days of the meeting;
- (iii) an Audit Committee be appointed with effect from the 2009/10 municipal year;
- (iv) the Audit Committee membership be comprised of all non-Executive members;
- (v) the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee be appointed from different constituent authorities in the interests of representations of the communities of North Wales;
- (vi) the Committee has the four primary roles of governance audit and scrutiny, financial and resource management audit and scrutiny, risk management and assurance audit and scrutiny and performance audit and scrutiny;
- (vii) the Committee assumes the constitutional roles and responsibilities of overview and scrutiny;
- (viii) the Committee has a forward work programme according to its terms of reference and the reporting cycles of the Authority (e.g. the budget cycle, the improvement plan cycle);
- (ix) the Committee meets a minimum of twice per municipal year;
- (x) the Committee has the facility to set-up time-limited task groups to undertake reviews and the discretion to co-opt Executive members with relevant expertise onto these groups; and
- (xi) the Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer and Clerk assess the resourcing needs (secretarial and professional advice) of the Audit Committee.

11 WELSH LANGUAGE BOARD: MONITORING REPORT

11.1 The report was presented to inform Members that North Wales Fire and Rescue Service has received positive feedback from the Welsh Language Board on its Welsh Language Scheme Monitoring Report for 2007-08.

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

12 WALES CHARTER FOR MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT: UPDATE

12.1 The report was presented to update Members on the progress of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development. Members were also asked to nominate a 'champion' to sponsor the strategy and programme.

12.2 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) **note the information provided;**
- (ii) **endorse the membership of the Champions' working group (since the meeting, it has been confirmed that Cllr G James will replace Cllr B Dunn on the group);**
- (iii) **nominate Cllr S Frobisher as a 'champion' to sponsor the strategy and programme;**
- (iv) **and Members agreed to complete and return the business development review form and the training and development questionnaire to the Member Liaison Officer by 31/12/08.**

13 **INFORMATIVE MAGAZINE**

13.1 Members were presented with the latest issue of the 'Informative' magazine. The Chief Fire Officer drew Members' attention to the article about the family of a man from Penyffordd who died in a fire who are now working with the Service to promote the safety message.

13.2 **RESOLVED to accept the publication.**

14 **DATES OF MEETINGS IN 2009**

14.1 Members were provided with dates of Authority and Executive Panel meetings for 2009.

14.2 **RESOLVED to note the dates for meetings.**