

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 21st September 2009 at Wrexham Fire Station. Meeting commenced at 2pm.

PRESENT

Cllr S Frobisher (Chairman)	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr A M Jones (Vice-Chairman)	Anglesey County Council
Cllr M LI Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
Cllr G C Evans	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr T Evans	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr G James	Flintshire County Council
Cllr P Jeffares	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr J V Owen	Anglesey County Council
Cllr T Roberts	Gwynedd Council
Cllr W P Roberts	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr M Thomas	Conwy County Borough Council

ALSO PRESENT:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); K Finch (Treasurer); B Davies (Monitoring Officer); C Hanks, P Claydon and R Simmons (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); G Brandrick (Service Development Manager); R Fairhead (Senior Fire Safety Manager); L Roberts (Control Room Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); J Brown (Finance Manager); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer); S Jones (Member Liaison Assistant).

Apologies:

Cllr L W Davies	Anglesey County Council
Cllr W T Owen	Gwynedd Council
C Everett	Clerk to the Authority

1 TOUR OF WREXHAM FIRE STATION

1.1 The meeting was held at Wrexham fire station so that Members could have a tour of the building and see the current conditions and facilities. Stephen Roberts, Facilities Manager, then presented some indicative plans for the new tripartite building. The cost of the new building will be capped at £5m. It is hoped that the Assembly and Ambulance Service will purchase the land and charge the Fire and Rescue Service an affordable rent.

1.2 Cllr Owen raised concerns about the tendering process and it was agreed that he would speak to ACFO Hanks after the meeting. The tender process was explained and it was noted that the list of contractors was drawn from the construction line database advocated by the Assembly. Contractors who are not shortlisted are invited to contact officers to discuss any issues of concern.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 Councillors Brian Dunn and JV Owen declared an interest in the part II report Firefighters' Pension Payments.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

- 3.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 13th July 2009 were approved as a true and correct record.

4 MATTERS ARISING

- 4.1 There were no matters arising.

5 TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 5.1 The Executive Panel was asked to consider adopting revised terms of reference following the establishment of the Authority's Audit Committee.

- 5.2 Cllr T Roberts raised concerns about "2.3 (i) Executive Panel to Act as the Appointments Panel when appointing the Chief Fire Officer". The current Chief Fire Officer had been appointed by the whole Fire Authority and Cllr Roberts felt that this practice should continue.

- 5.3 **RESOLVED to accept the revised terms of reference subject to deleting 2.3 (i).**

6 ICT STRATEGY

- 6.1 Members received a presentation on the ICT strategy. ACFO Hanks explained the various strands of the ICT projects which are all inter-related.

(i) Airwave project – this will enable the police, ambulance and fire and rescue services to communicate on the same radio system.

(ii) Integrated Communications Control System has been installed in the Joint Communications Centre and the secondary control room in Rhyl. This system controls all voice data to control staff.

(iii) Mobile data project – this system transfers data to frontline staff by means of computers in the appliances. This will provide access to operational intelligence, mapping systems and other risk critical technical information.

(iv) Fire Records Management System (RMS) project – back-office system which stores all operational intelligence, legislative fire safety information and incident information for all individual premises.

(v) Network upgrade project – this is to ensure the Service has appropriate servers that can deal with all the additional volume of data.

(vi) Resilience project – connecting the three fire controls in Wales into one virtual control which will provide a back up system should one of the control rooms fail.

- 6.2 In response to a Member's question, it was confirmed that all three Services in Wales were currently investing heavily in ICT. Decisions about some of the projects, such as Firelink, had been taken at government level, however, all the systems were needed as they were inter-related and would enable staff to be more efficient. The vast amount of information available for sharing will be beneficial for the safety of firefighters and the public.
- 6.3 Although Members expressed concerns about the cost of installing the new systems as well as the maintenance costs, the Chief Fire Officer reminded Members of the possible cost of not having adequate systems in place in the event of a major incident.
- 6.4 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

7 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2008/09 AND LETTER OF REPRESENTATION

- 7.1 The Statement of Accounts for 2008-2009 and letter of representation from the Treasurer were presented to Members for information. The accounts had been audited by the Auditor appointed by the Wales Audit Office, KPMG, and amended in line with the findings from the audit and subsequent discussions over the accounting treatment, definitions and presentation of specific items within the accounts.
- 7.2 The Audit bodies in Wales, England and Scotland had been in discussions about the potential effect on the Statement of Accounts of the Financial Reporting Standard 17 (FRS17), Accounting for Pension costs, due to the discovery of an omission in the Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) Regulations 2003 which allows for the reversal of the FRS17 entries. The Treasurer confirmed that it had been agreed that Wales did not have to make the adjustment, however, the statement of accounts would need a minor amendment made to the wording. The letter of representation would remain the same.
- 7.3 **RESOLVED to:**
(i) note the amended Statement of Accounts for 2008-09 subject to a further amendment about FRS17 as per paragraph 7.2;
(ii) acknowledge the Letter of Representation sent to the External Auditor.

8 INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ON AUDITING (ISA) 260 – REPORT TO THOSE CHARGED WITH GOVERNANCE

- 8.1 Joanne West, Audit Manager from KPMG, presented the report to Members. The key matters from the statement of accounts had to be communicated to those charged with governance in accordance with the ISA 260.
- 8.2 The auditors had no concerns about the accounting practices and had not identified any weaknesses in internal control. All accounts would be completed by 30th September.
- 8.3 Members congratulated the audit and finance team and **RESOLVED to note the report.**

9 UPDATE ON THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND LINKS TO THE IMPROVEMENT PLAN AND RISK REDUCTION ACTION PLAN

9.1 The report was presented to update Members on progress made with the public consultation exercise over the summer months, and its extension to the end of September.

9.2 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed Members that more responses had been received to the consultation than in previous years and that they included a variety of opinions. With the agreement of the Wales Audit Office the consultation period had been extended to the end of September.

9.3 The findings of the consultation would be presented to the fire cover and risk review working group which would be reconvened in October.

9.4 **RESOLVED to:**

(i) note the extension of the consultation process;

(ii) approve the proposal to refer the results of the consultation to the reconvened fire cover and risk review working group, membership of which will be as follows: Cllr S Frobisher; Cllr A M Jones; Cllr M Ll Davies; Cllr Dunn; Cllr G C Evans; Cllr P Jeffares; Cllr J V Owen; Cllr B Roberts; Cllr T Roberts.

10 BUDGET OPTIONS FOR 2010/11

10.1 Members had received a paper on budget options on 13th July 2009 and the report submitted to this meeting provided further information about significant known budget pressures for 2010/11 and beyond. Members were requested to note the prudent percentage increase for pay awards and inflation which could be incorporated within the budget for 2010/11.

10.2 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained the various budget lines and highlighted the following:

- The Pay cost line was now in the region of £62k rather than £293k due to provision for pay being made in the last financial year.
- Members would need to decide on a prudent level of general inflation for 2010/11.
- The Firelink budget for Wales was estimated at £3m, however, it was unknown how much of this would be made available to North Wales.
- Confirmed that the costs of job evaluation could be contained within the £169,195 set aside.
- Long Term Capability – cost unknown, however, it was likely that the Authority would be able to meet the cost but it could increase in future years.

10.3 In response to a Member's question about carbon emissions, it was confirmed that the Authority has the services of an environmental officer employed by North Wales Police whose remit is to ensure buildings become as energy efficient as possible. This was not a financial pressure.

- 10.4 The Treasurer reminded Members that the Revenue Support Grant Settlement for Wales was likely to be low, with a possible average of 1.3%. Further announcements about the budget are expected on 13th October. The Treasurer was unable to recommend the 5.14% percentage increase that was noted in the paper and further work would be done to mitigate costs wherever possible.
- 10.5 **RESOLVED to note the pressures highlighted, the budget requirements and the risk attached to each planning assumption.**
- 11 PERFORMANCE MONITORING
- 11.1 The report was presented to provide Members with information about the Service's activity and performance.
- 11.2 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed Members that a new format of monitoring performance had been introduced in England and Wales on 1st April 2009 and there were some issues still to be resolved before the system could provide like for like comparisons with previous years. In future the system would be able to provide far more information including trend analysis.
- 11.3 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer highlighted the following:
- slight increase in chimney fires which had been anticipated and the community fire safety team is working to highlight the risks in the community.
 - there had been no accidental dwelling fire deaths since the beginning of the financial year.
- 11.4 **RESOLVED to note the information provided in the performance report.**
- 12 REVISED WELSH LANGUAGE SCHEME 2010-13
- 12.1 The Executive Panel was asked to approve the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's revised Welsh Language Scheme prior to public consultation.
- 12.2 Assistant Chief Fire Officer Hanks explained that the revised scheme outlines the details of the Linguistic Skills Strategy which was launched earlier in the year and which is based on a gradual approach to achieving goals over the next three to five years. The scheme also outlines how the Service aims to enhance the positive attitude towards the use of Welsh in the workplace. New members of staff have to pass a level 1 Welsh test to ensure they are able to pronounce names and greet people correctly – from 2010 the requirement will be to pass a level 2 test.
- 12.3 **RESOLVED to approve the revised Welsh Language Scheme 2010-13 for public consultation.**
- 13 WELSH LANGUAGE BOARD MONITORING REPORT
- 13.1 The Service is required to produce an annual monitoring report to the Welsh Language Board on its Welsh language scheme. The Executive Panel was

asked to approve the monitoring report prior to its formal submission to the Welsh Language Board.

13.2 Cllr G Evans congratulated the Service on its approach to the Welsh language and it was evident that Welsh was being used in the offices which was appreciated by Welsh speakers.

13.3 **RESOLVED to note the progress made on the Welsh Language Scheme and approve the 2008-09 monitoring report for formal submission to the Welsh Language Board.**

14 OPERATIONAL MANAGER PROVISION

14.1 Assistant Chief Fire Officer Claydon gave Members a presentation on the officer cover review.

14.2 As part of the risk reduction plan 2009/10 it had been agreed that an officer cover review would be undertaken. ACFO Claydon explained that the Incident Command System (ICS) is the nationally adopted system of commanding incidents. It provides for officer cover at the same level 24hours, 7 days per week, 365 days per year. Some of the disadvantages of the current system is that it does not:

- provide operational assurance
- reflect demand
- maximise prevention delivery.

14.3 With the current rota/duty system, the lost potential per officer was 520 hours per annum/65 work days, and lost potential to the Service was 14560 hours per annum or 1820 work days.

14.4 The review had engaged all officers and focused on context, current practice and future possibilities. Consultation had been undertaken with the officers that would be affected and although there were some concerns, overall they recognised the case for change. ACFO Claydon was currently preparing a report for the Chief Fire Officer to consider.

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

15 FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION PAYMENTS – PART II

15.1 Members were informed of a number of discrepancies that had been discovered upon checking files of those who were in receipt of a firefighter's pension from North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

15.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- (i) note the information in the report;**
- (ii) note the approach to informing those affected by the correction of these discrepancies;**
- (iii) approve the proposal not to seek to recover past overpayments.**