

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 13th July 2009 at the Fire and Rescue Headquarters, St Asaph. Meeting commenced at 2pm.

PRESENT

Cllr S Frobisher (Chairman)	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr A M Jones (Vice-Chairman)	Anglesey County Council
Cllr L W Davies	Anglesey County Council
Cllr M LI Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr G C Evans	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr T Evans	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr P Jeffares	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr J V Owen	Anglesey County Council
Cllr W T Owen	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); C Everett (Clerk); C Hanks and R Simmons (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); G Griffiths (Senior Operations Manager); G Brandrick (Service Development Manager); L Roberts (Control Room Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); I Williams (Executive Support Manager); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer); M Halstead (Conwy County Borough Council, Internal Audit); Mike Owen (RDS Project Manager).

Apologies:

Cllr B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
Cllr T Roberts	Gwynedd County Council
P Claydon	Assistant Chief Fire Officer
R Fairhead	Senior Fire Safety Manager

1 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 11th May 2009 were approved as a true and correct record.

2 MATTERS ARISING

2.1 *3.3 working with young people section – in response to a Member's question about future funding for this area of work, it was noted that this information would not be available until the Autumn.*

3 INTERNAL AUDIT STRATEGY 2008-2012

3.1 The report was presented to inform Members of the overall strategy of Internal Audit. Internal Audit is an assurance function that primarily provides an independent and objective opinion to the organisation of its controls and management of risks.

3.2 It was explained that the Internal Audit Team has a rolling programme of areas to be audited, and therefore they may be auditing areas of both high and low risk in the forthcoming years.

3.3 **RESOLVED to accept the Internal Audit Strategy 2008–2012.**

4 SUMMARY OF INTERNAL AUDIT ACTIVITY 2008/09 AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND DRAFT AUDIT PLAN FOR 2009/10

4.1 The report was presented to inform Members of the summary of Internal Audit work undertaken in 2008/09 and to ask Members to approve the Internal Audit Needs Assessment and Draft Internal Audit Plan for 2009/10.

4.2 Members were reminded that they themselves via Authority and Executive Panel meetings scrutinised some areas of work, such as the capital programme, throughout the year.

4.3 **RESOLVED to:**

(i) note the Summary of Internal Audit activity 2008/09; and

(ii) approve the Needs Assessment and Draft Internal Audit Plan for 2009/10.

5 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2008/09

5.1 The report was presented to Members as the Authority is required to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of its systems of Internal Control. From 2009/10 onwards the statement of internal control would be superseded by the annual governance statement.

5.2 For the 12 months ended 31st March 2009, NWFRA had satisfactory internal control and corporate governance processes to manage the achievement of the Authority's objectives.

5.3 **RESOLVED to accept the Internal Audit Annual Statement of Assurance and for it to be utilised to contribute to the evidence content of the 2008/09 Statement of Internal Control.**

6 RETAINED DUTY SYSTEM FORUM

- 6.1 The Chairman welcomed Mike Owen, Project Manager of the Retained Duty System (RDS) to the meeting. Members received a presentation on the work of the RDS Forum which had been in existence since 2007.
- 6.2 The Forum's membership includes ACFO Simmons, Mike Owen and 12 RDS members of staff who maintain primary employment and RDS duties and also attend Forum meetings on a quarterly basis. Members of the Forum were keen for the Executive Panel to receive an update of the Forum's work and to assure Members that RDS day-to-day issues and long term concerns were being discussed on a regular basis.
- 6.3 In setting the scene, Mike Owen referred to the Review of the Recruitment and Retention Challenges which was published in 2006 following the establishment of a review board to examine RDS issues in England and Wales. The report made a series of recommendations in respect of the challenges which included recognition and publicity of RDS work, recruitment and retention and financial implications.
- 6.4 The Executive Panel considered the recommendations in 2007 and agreed that the main issues for North Wales were equalities, recruitment and retention, the wider role of RDS personnel and the salary scheme. The Panel set target dates for the implementation of a series of recommendations including the establishment of the RDS Forum.
- 6.5 Work in the following areas was now complete:
- employer pack created - its purpose was to strengthen engagement with local businesses for the release of staff for RDS duties and to highlight the benefits an RDS employee may bring to their business;
 - intranet uploads – work of the Forum published for all staff to view;
 - consultation on the Incident Recording System.
- 6.6 Work was in progress in the following areas:
- raising the profile – articles published in "Y Fflam" and engaging with various departments to identify the needs of the RDS personnel;
 - all-Wales RDS working group continued to meet and gave the RDS forum an opportunity to meet with counterparts from Mid and West and South Wales; its purpose was to formulate a collaborative approach and share best practice;
 - application pack – to be updated to provide information on what can be expected as an RDS member, the expected commitment and benefits it may bring the individual and their primary employer;

- streamlining administration.
- 6.7 Following the recent firefighters' recruitment campaign, 3 members from RDS had been appointed to the wholetime duty system. They had been subject to the same application process but had participated only in the interview stage as they had previously completed the physical test.
- 6.8 The CFO informed Members that in addition to the above work, the Assembly had established a committee to look at retained issues in Wales and its report should be published by March 2010.
- 6.9 In response to a question about engaging with employers, it was noted that the Assembly was very supportive of this approach. Mr Owen had visited a number of local authorities who were now releasing staff for RDS duties. There was a perception that RDS firefighters were called away continuously but in reality there was very little disturbance to the employer's business.
- 6.10 The Clerk offered to coordinate work with councils across North Wales to promote RDS. He felt that as large employers there was an opportunity to reach a wide audience and that work should be done with HR departments in the councils. This offer was well received and agreed for further action.
- 6.11 The Vice-Chairman stressed the importance of the work of the RDS and was grateful to members of the RDS Forum who gave up their own time to bring forward positive ideas via the Forum.
- 6.12 **RESOLVED to note the information provided in the presentation.**

7 BUDGET PROSPECTS 2010/11

- 7.1 The report was presented as an early opportunity to inform Members of the significant known budget pressures for 2010/11 and beyond. It was not possible for all pressures to be quantified at this stage, but where possible they had been included to produce an indicative budget for next year. An example is the job evaluation exercise which is now moving to the pay-modelling phase and thereafter the exact costs for next year would be known.
- 7.2 The Service will be faced with pressures of the revenue cost of Firelink and the ICT infrastructure and also the cost of borrowing capital. An increase of 4.7% was indicated at this stage, but the RSG settlement is likely to be much less.

- 7.3 It was anticipated that the pay award for firefighters will be 1.25% for 2009/10; this would be discussed further by the National Joint Council on 23rd July.
- 7.4 Members were grateful for the early report and were agreed that all constituent authorities were also facing severe cutbacks in their funding and that the Authority's settlement would need to be kept as low as possible.
- 7.5 **RESOLVED to request a presentation on the ICT infrastructure at the September meeting and note the information provided to date in relation to budget pressures.**
- 8 APPOINTMENT OF A HEALTH AND SAFETY CHAMPION
- 8.1 The report was presented to request Members to consider the introduction of a Health and Safety Champion.
- 8.2 The Service had recently reviewed its Health and Safety Policy and, as part of the process, believed that there would be a great benefit in having a Fire Authority Health and Safety Champion to provide political leadership to the management of Health and Safety.
- 8.3 The Vice-Chairman nominated Cllr M LI Davies as H&S champion and this was agreed by all Members.
- 8.4 **RESOLVED that Cllr M LI Davies be appointed as the Fire Authority's Health and Safety Champion.**