

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
EXECUTIVE PANEL

Minutes of the **Executive Panel** of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 12 December 2022 virtually via Zoom. Meeting commenced at 14.00hrs.

Councillor

Cllr Dylan Rees (Chair)
Cllr Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
Cllr Carol Beard
Cllr Chrissy Gee
Cllr Alan Hughes
Cllr Chris Hughes
Cllr Gareth A Roberts
Cllr Paul Rogers
Cllr Gareth Sandilands
Cllr Dale Selvester
Cllr Ken Taylor

Representing

Conwy County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Anglesey County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Council (left 15:04)
Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council (left 16.10)
Anglesey County Council

Also present:

Dawn Docx
Stewart Forshaw
Richard Fairhead
Stuart Millington
Helen MacArthur
Anthony Jones
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
Nick Selwyn
Euros Lake
George Jones
Lisa Allington
Louisa Phillips

Chief Fire Officer
Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Area Manager
Treasurer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Audit Wales
Audit Wales
Atebol - Translator
Executive Assistant
M365 Change Manager

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Cllr Rondo Roberts
Cllr Rob Triggs

Representing

Wrexham County Council
Gwynedd Council

ABSENT

Councillor

Representing

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest to record.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 There was no notice of urgent matters.

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JULY 2022

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 29 July 2022 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the minutes as a true and correct record of the meetings held.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 With regards to item 6 - the report which provided an overview of the Thematic Review of the Fire and Rescue Services' capacity to assume a broader role for firefighters in Wales – a letter was sent to the Deputy Minister, Hannah Blythin, and the Chair and CFO subsequently met with her. Following that meeting, the Deputy Minister released an oral statement asking all three Fire and Rescue Services (FRS) in Wales to submit their plans, to address the recommendations in the two thematic reviews into capacity for broadening the role and for training, which North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) subsequently did. A letter has since been received thanking the Service for its efforts.

6. AUDIT WALES – REDUCING FIRE ALARMS

6.1 CFO Docx presented the Reducing Fire Alarms report which introduced Members to the Terms of Reference for this year's thematic review being undertaken by Audit Wales.

6.2 Representatives from Audit Wales gave a presentation giving a general overview of the role of the Auditor General for Wales, and the rationale for their thematic review on reducing false alarms.

6.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- (i) note the purpose of the review;**
- (ii) note the main questions the review seeks to answer; and**
- (iii) note the timescales for the review.**

7. BIODIVERSITY REPORT

7.1 AM Jones presented the Biodiversity Report which addressed North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's (the Authority's) compliance with section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. It also provided information on proposed future planning and reporting of actions by the Authority in relation to improving biodiversity within its estate.

- 7.2 **RESOLVED to:**
(i) **approve the contents of the Biodiversity Report and Action Plan 2022, to be incorporated into a publication on the Authority's website before the end of December 2022.**

8. MANCHESTER ARENA INQUIRY – VERBAL REPORT

- 8.1 ACFO Millington gave a verbal presentation on the Manchester Arena Inquiry, which informed Members of the background to the inquiry into the events following the bomb explosion at an Ariane Grande concert in May 2017 which claimed 22 lives. Soon after the attack, the Mayor of Manchester ordered an Independent Review to take place and in March 2018, the Kerslake report was published which made 20 recommendations.
- 8.2 A subsequent public inquiry was ordered with volume one of the enquiry report being released in 2021, and the second volume released this year. Volume two focused on the response of the emergency services. This included 109 recommendations, with 21 of these being monitored.
- 8.3 The Service will be working through the recommendations and will, in time, report back to the FRA actions to address any relevant recommendations.
- 8.4 **RESOLVED to:**
i) **note the content of the verbal update.**

9. CHIEF FIRE AND RESCUE ADVISOR'S THEMATIC REVIEW INTO OPERATIONAL TRAINING – VERBAL REPORT

- 9.1 DCFO Forshaw gave a verbal presentation on the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's Thematic Review into Operational Training.
- 9.2 The key areas looked at within this review were the provision of initial and maintenance training into: use of breathing apparatus; casualty care; command and control; hazardous materials; pumps, knots, ladders and lines; road traffic collision training; safe working at heights; and water incidents. Training provision facilities were also looked at, including the geographical location of training centres.
- 9.3 **RESOLVED to:**
i) **note the content of the verbal update.**

10 CYBER ESSENTIALS (CE) / CYBER ESSENTIALS+ (CE+)

10.1 ACFO Fairhead presented the Cyber Essentials (CE) / Cyber Essentials+ (CE+) report which informed Members of the Authority of the work the service was currently undertaking with regards to cyber security.

10.2 Members were asked to note that part of the reasoning behind not pursuing the CE+ qualification at the current time was in order to save the cost of employing someone specifically to oversee this work. One Member suggested that using contractors rather than employing a dedicated resource may be a way of saving money in this area.

10.3 RESOLVED to:

- (i) note the work being carried out by the Service on cyber protection, including the Service working towards CE certification in the first instance.**

11 PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2022/23: QUARTERS 1 & 2

11.1 DCFO Forshaw presented the Performance Monitoring 2022/23: Quarters 1 & 2 report which provided information about incident activity during the first half of the 2022/23 financial year; performance in relation to the Authority's improvement and well-being objectives; and other notable incident activity.

11.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) note the content of the performance monitoring report**

12 REVIEW OF IMPROVEMENT AND WELLBEING OBJECTIVES IN THE AUTHORITY'S CORPORATE PLAN 2021-24

12.1 DCFO Forshaw presented the report on the Review of Improvement and Wellbeing Objectives in the Authority's Corporate Plan 2021-24, which presented to Members the Authority's long-term objectives contained in its Corporate Plan 2021-24.

12.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) confirm the Authority's intention to continue to pursue its existing seven long-term objectives in 2023/24; and**
- ii) request that an updated version of the Corporate Plan 2021-24 be prepared by Officers for approval in April 2023.**

13 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023/26 AND BUDGET 2023/24

- 13.1 The Treasurer presented the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2023/26 and Budget 2023/24 report to Members which presented to Members the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2023/26 and the draft revenue and capital budgets for 2023/24. The report also set out the significant risks and uncertainties faced at this time.
- 13.2 It was clarified that Members were not being asked to approve the budget today, but merely to endorse it and recommend that it be approved at the Full Authority meeting on 16 January 2023.
- 13.3 The figures within the report were summarised for Members by way of a presentation on screen. Members were asked to note that many of the increases were inevitable and beyond the Service's control due to the current financial climate, and that a number also related to the Service's priorities, which there was a legal obligation on it to fulfil. Members expressed their concern over the significant increase in levy to their constituent councils, in light of the fact that Local Authorities were already struggling with their own finances.
- 13.4 It was noted that this paper had been presented to the Audit Committee this morning and that they had voted to amend the recommendations and to only note the content of the report. An extraordinary meeting would be held prior to the Full Fire Authority meeting in January in order to discuss the content in more depth.
- 13.5 Members were reminded that a Fire Cover Review was currently being undertaken and should they wish for significant savings to be found, this would need to be considered following this review, and those savings be fed back into the budget setting for 2024/25.

13.6 RESOLVED to:

- (i) note the capital and revenue budgets for 2023/24 based on an increase in contributions from constituent authorities of £5.32m;**
- (ii) note the key risks and uncertainties identified during the budget planning process; and**
- (iii) note the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.**

14. NEW TRAINING CENTRE

- 14.1 DCFO Forshaw presented the New Training Centre report which updated Members on the work undertaken to date on the production of a detailed business case for the option/s of a new training and development centre in North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service).

14.2 The importance of a suitable, effective and fit for purpose training facility in order to ensure that firefighters received the best training possible was acknowledged. However, concerns were expressed at the contribution that this would have with regards to the increase in budget, and the subsequent increase in the levy to Local Authorities.

14.3 It was proposed that this item be deferred to the next meeting, following the budget proposals. This was seconded and the vote carried unanimously.

14.4 RESOLVED to:

- (i) note the background to review of training provision, including the Chief Fire Advisor for Wales' thematic review;**
- (ii) note that the current training provision is reaching its end of life;**
- (iii) note the timescales set out in this report for the provision of a detailed business case for Members' consideration.**

15 URGENT MATTERS

15.1 There were no urgent matters to raise.

At the end of Part I of the agenda, recording of the meeting ceased and it was agreed to move into Part II of the meeting.

16. INDUSTRIAL ACTION (VERBAL)

16.1 The CFO gave a verbal report which updated Members of the progress regarding national pay negotiations, the potential for industrial action and the business continuity arrangements being put in place.

16.2 A Part II paper had been previously presented to Members outlining the 2% pay offer to firefighters and control room staff, which had subsequently been rejected.

16.3 The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had recommended that their members rejected the subsequent increased offer of 5% with no conditions attached, which they had done, and a ballot for Industrial Action had been commenced with a closing date of the end of January 2023. Unfortunately, the FBU had not indicated what percentage they would accept and so there is no way of telling how far out the offer is.

16.4 It was noted that there were no rules in Wales with regards to percentage of votes required for Industrial Action as there was in England, and so the Service was expecting strike action to proceed.

- 16.5 Members were reminded that the Service was bound by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities with regards to the continued provision of services in the event of strike action. These requirements were summarised.
- 16.6 The Service was required to plan accordingly so that it could not be criticised for not maintaining provision of service during any period of strike action.
- 16.7 The possible courses of action available to FBU members were: action short of strike action which would mean that firefighters would refuse to undertake any overtime; discontinuous strike action for periods of three or four hours or whole shifts; or continuous strike action. All of these options were being planned for.
- 16.8 Those present were informed that a large number of officers, firefighters and members of the control room were in the FBU and would therefore be expected to comply with the result of the ballot. Any senior officers not taking part in the strike action would be undertaking refresher training early in the New Year. Plans were also being put in place for non-FBU members to be trained to work during periods of Industrial action.
- 16.9 The Service was looking at the best places geographically to place resilience appliances and which types of incident the Service would attend in the event of strike action. Small secondary and bin fires would likely not be attended whilst threat to life and road traffic collisions would. It was also being factored in to planning that February is the beginning of controlled burning season and so this could pose a potential issue.
- 16.10 Members may have heard that other Fire Services were advertising for resilience crew staff; however, having considered this the option had been discounted as it comes with a significant cost and provides little in terms of resilience due to the challenges of training them to do anything other than defensive firefighting outside of a building.
- 16.11 The Service has been in negotiation with the army for assistance but at the moment, have decided not to put in a Military Aid to Civil Authorities (MACA) request, again in part due to the cost which was around £4,000 per soldier per week, and because of the same concerns surrounding lack of time to deliver relevant training. However, even if the army were affordable there would be no guarantee that they would have the capacity to help.

16.12 It was queried as to why the army were not charging a marginal cost as they had on previous occasions and responded that as this was not a national emergency they would not do so. The possibility of asking the Welsh Government to use their influence to insist on marginal costs was being considered so that this could become a more feasible option.

16.12 Most importantly, the Service continued to work with local FBU officials in order to maintain a culture of mutual respect and cooperation. The Service also remained committed to updating the Fire Authority at every opportunity.

Meeting closed at 16:30hrs