

## **NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 22 September 2014 at Anglesey County Council Chamber, Llangefni. Meeting commenced at 10.45am.

### **PRESENT**

#### **Councillor**

M LI Davies (Chair)  
P R Lewis (Deputy Chair)  
R Davies  
L W Davies  
B Dunn  
A Evans  
J G Evans  
J M Evans  
A Jones  
D Kelly  
G Lowe  
D A MacRae  
H McGuill  
P Owen  
W R Owen  
R E Parry  
D Simmons  
G G Williams  
R Wright

#### **Representing**

Denbighshire County Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Anglesey County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Anglesey County Council  
Anglesey County Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Gwynedd Council

### **Also present:**

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); C P Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); G Owens (Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer); D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); R Simmons and R Fairhead (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); G W Griffiths (Training and Development Manager); G Brandrick (Senior Fire Safety Manager); K Roberts (Senior Operations Manager); L Roberts (Senior Control and Business Continuity Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); S Forrest (Accountant, Treasurer's Department, Conwy County Borough Council); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer) and S Jones (Member Liaison Assistant).

### **APOLOGIES**

#### **Councillor**

A I Dunbar  
D J Miles  
W T Owen  
M A Reece  
W P Shotton  
J R Skelland  
A Tansley  
W O Thomas

#### **Representing**

Flintshire County Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Flintshire County Council

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JUNE 2014

2.1 The minutes of the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 16 June 2014 were submitted for approval.

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

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 (3.1) Wrexham Fire and Ambulance Station – the Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the turf cutting ceremony was held on 19 September. The Health Minister Mark Drakeford AM and Lesley Griffiths AM for Wrexham were both present together with ambulance and fire and rescue personnel.

3.2 (6.2) Fire and Rescue Services in Wales Project – Members were informed that the national fire and rescue framework will be reviewed as part of the project. As discussed at the last Authority meeting, the three CFOs would be attending Programme Board meetings as observers and the first meeting was to take place after the Authority meeting. Members will be kept informed of developments at Authority and Executive Panel meetings. It is anticipated that the review of the fire and rescue authorities' constitution will be addressed through the work on the Williams Commission report.

3.3 At this juncture Cllr Dunn commented on an article in the local paper about Deeside fire station. The CFO confirmed that there has been a delay with the refurbishment work but the Service has implemented its business continuity and emergency plan which should ensure minimal delay with the building works and the station will continue to respond to operational incidents from there.

3.4 (16.2) Industrial Dispute – the CFO informed Members that the Fire Brigades Union and UK government were still in dialogue and there had been some potential developments. It was confirmed that there had been no industrial action since August.

4 URGENT MATTERS

4.1 There were no urgent matters.

5 CHAIR'S REPORT

5.1 The report listed meetings and events attended by Cllr M Li Davies and Cllr P R Lewis in their roles of Chair and Deputy Chair of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority between June and September 2014.

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

## 6 IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES 2015-16 CONSULTATION: EMERGING FINDINGS

6.1 The CFO informed members that as part of the consultation on the Authority's future improvement objectives, the CFO and DCFO had met with the chief executives of all councils in North Wales prior to meeting with the councillors. They had attended Denbighshire and Flintshire council meetings on 9 September and will be attending meetings with councillors of the remaining four councils before the end of October. The draft consultation document will be published for the 12-weeks' public consultation period.

6.2 The Clerk commented that the Authority's performance assessment for 2013-14 would be a good information document to share with all councillors.

6.3 **RESOLVED to note the update provided.**

## 7 DRAFT ASSESSMENT OF THE AUTHORITY'S PERFORMANCE IN 2013-14

7.1 The DCFO introduced the performance assessment document written by Shân Morris, Corporate Planning Manager, and led members through the document which provided information about the services provided and the context in which they are provided.

7.2 The document had been compiled in compliance with Section 15 of the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2009, to give an account of the Authority's activities and performance in 2013-14 in one document. It gave an assessment of how the Authority had discharged its general duty to improve and its progress against the improvement objectives it had set itself. It also summarised the Authority's performance against specified national and local performance indicators and measures of success. Members noted that there were additional graphs comparing performance with other FRAs following the WAO's request that the Authority should make more comparisons with other FRAs in the UK.

7.3 The following areas of performance were highlighted to members:

- the attendance times to reach incidents have remained relatively constant since 2011-12
- the Authority's expenditure on community safety as a proportion of its budget for 2012-13 was one of the highest in the UK demonstrating the Authority's commitment to prevention and protecting the people of North Wales against fires
- although there had been an increase of 3% in fires in North Wales in 2013-14, this could be attributed to the exceptionally low number of fires in 2012-13 deemed to be because of the unusually high rainfall in that year. However, 3% increase compared relatively well to the figure of 10% increase in England and a 15% increase in the whole of Wales.
- the number of hospitalised casualties from accidental dwelling fires per 10,000 population in 2013-14 was considered to be higher than expected and it was noted that officers would be undertaking further research to identify the cause.

- 7.4 Members discussed various aspects of the document and in response to a member's question about whether the increase in accidental dwelling fires was because the installation of smoke detectors made people more complacent about fire safety, the DCFO explained that it was more likely due to there being more vulnerable people susceptible to fires in the community.
- 7.5 Cllr Lewis congratulated the author on the document which he felt provided a wealth of information and suggested that graphs in future reports could have a different colour for the other FRAs in Wales to make comparison across Wales easier to identify.
- 7.6 **RESOLVED to approve the draft assessment of the Authority's performance in 2013-14 for publication before the statutory deadline of 31 October 2014.**
- 8 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2014-2015
- 8.1 The Treasurer introduced the report which gave an estimated provisional outturn for the financial year 2014-15. Currently there is an estimated underspend predicted for the end of the financial year, however, this could change depending on incident levels between now and March 2015. The Treasurer led members through the report explaining the variances to various budget headings.
- 8.2 Eighteen new wholetime duty system rural firefighters were now in post as part of a pilot project established to identify ways of having more cost effective fire cover in rural areas; the results will be presented to members once the pilot has finished. Operationally it has been necessary to provide vehicles large enough to carry the equipment required for 'mobile' firefighters and currently 15 vehicles have been hired for this purpose. However, it was considered that it would be more beneficial both operationally and financially to purchase the vehicles and any additional equipment that may be required through the capital programme, the estimated cost is £300k. In order to reduce future debt charges it is recommended that the costs of the vehicles and equipment is funded from the underspend in the current year.
- 8.3 **RESOLVED to**  
**(i) note the current estimated underspend of £381,218; and**  
**(ii) agree to set money aside to finance capital expenditure in order to reduce future debt charges.**
- 9 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2013-14
- 9.1 The Treasurer presented the audited Statement of Accounts for 2013-14 and the Annual Governance Statement for approval.
- 9.2 It was noted that members of the Audit Committee at its meeting on 15 September 2014 had reviewed the contents and had no major observations nor could find any major risks in the report and would recommend it be approved by the Authority. The annual governance statement had previously been approved and was included as an appendix to the statement of accounts. The letter of representation addressed to both the Wales Audit Office and KPMG from the Authority was also presented for approval. The letter is a requirement of Auditing Standards in that KPMG needs to obtain representations from the Authority to support its audit opinion.

- 9.3 It was confirmed that the accounts had been audited by the Auditor appointed by the Wales Audit Office 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.
- 9.4 Members were asked to note that the figure on page 26 under paragraph 8 should read 10,838 not 10,828 and this would be amended prior to publication of the statement of accounts by 30 September 2014.
- 9.5 **RESOLVED to approve the audited statement of accounts 2013-14 and note the letter of representation sent to the external auditors.**
- 10 TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS
- 10.1 The Treasurer presented the latest information on the Authority's treasury management and prudential indicators. As with the statement of accounts, it was noted that members of the Audit Committee at its meeting on 15 September 2014 had reviewed the contents in detail and had no major observations nor could find any major risks in the report and would recommend it be approved by the Authority.
- 10.2 **RESOLVED to**
- (i) approve the amended prudential indicators;**
  - (ii) note the current counterparties;**
  - (iii) note the two new PWLB loans, one of which replaced a loan that had matured and the other to support the capital programme.**
- 11 CHIEF OFFICERS' PAY AWARD 2014
- 11.1 The Treasurer presented the report which asked Members to endorse the agreement in respect of the pay award for 2014 that has been reached by the National Joint Council for Brigade Managers of Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC).
- 11.2 The Treasurer explained that the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2014 make provision relating to remuneration of chief officers. This is to ensure any decision to determine or vary the remuneration of chief officers (or those to be appointed as chief officers) must be made by full authority, without the possibility of delegating it to a committee of the authority. This includes any annual pay increase agreed on a national basis.
- 11.3 **RESOLVED to endorse the National Joint Council's decision in respect of the pay award with effect from 1 January 2014 as follows:**
- an increase of 1.0% on basic salary applicable to brigade managers earning a basic salary of £99,999 or lower (as at 31 December 2013)**
  - a flat rate increase of £1000 on basic salary applicable to brigade managers earning a basic salary of £100,000 or more (as at 31 December 2013).**

## 12 COMPLAINTS AND LETTERS OF APPRECIATION

- 12.1 ACFO Ruth Simmons presented the report which informed Members about the number of complaints and letters of appreciation received from the public between 1 April 2013 – 31 March 2014.
- 12.2 The Service will only investigate those complaints received that fall under the definition of a complaint as set out by the Public Service Ombudsman for Wales; nine of the 21 complaints received were therefore defined as complaints. It was worthy of note that although the Service had undertaken 11,652 'Blue Light' journeys when responding to operational incidents, only two driving complaints had been received during this reporting period. In the same period 73 letters, cards, e-mails, Twitter and Facebook messages were received expressing appreciation and satisfaction with the Service.
- 12.3 **RESOLVED to note the number of complaints and expressions of appreciation received.**

## 13 DEVOLUTION, DEMOCRACY AND DELIVERY WHITE PAPER – REFORMING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- 13.1 The CFO presented the report which asked Members to approve the Authority's response to the Welsh Government's White Paper on Devolution, Democracy and Delivery – Reforming Local Government.
- 13.2 Members discussed the draft response and acknowledged that it concentrated on those set questions that impacted directly on the fire and rescue authority. Overall, Members were content with the response and noted the advice that the questions which were unanswered in the draft would be ably covered by the WLGA response. It was agreed to add a paragraph to challenge why the health service was not included within the brief of the Public Services Commission and thereby the White Paper, given the impacts of the growing financial needs of the National Health Service on the Welsh budget and the local government settlement.
- 13.3 In response to questions whether the Fire Brigades Union had an input into the Authority's response, it was confirmed that the response had not been shared with the FBU. The CFO was unaware as to whether or not the FBU had submitted its own response. Cllr A Jones proposed that the Authority share its response with the FBU; this was agreed, with the caveat that the Chair and CFO be given delegated authority to decide whether to vary the Authority's final response having taken into consideration any views submitted by the FBU.
- 13.4 Members were supportive of the response to the question on councillors/members' remuneration but were concerned that the Commission and WG officials failed to understand that the Authority's Audit Committee undertook the scrutiny function, and suggested that this should be explained again in the response under the question on FRA governance.

- 13.5 **RESOLVED to delegate authority to the Chair and Chief Fire Officer to finalise the response for submission to the Welsh Government subject to**
- (i) amending the response as set out above; and**
  - (ii) sharing the draft response with the FBU and taking into consideration any comments submitted by the representative body.**

14 INDUSTRIAL ACTION COSTS

14.1 The report was presented to inform members of the expenditure incurred to date relating to the Fire Brigades Union strike action. The CFO explained that although the dispute has not concluded, the Service had received several freedom of information requests about the cost of the dispute and had therefore decided to publish the information.

14.2 It was noted that since the initial strike action on 25 September 2013, the FBU has called 32 periods of industrial action up to and including the last strike on 16 August 2014. In order for the Service to carry out its business continuity arrangements (which ensure that it maintains its provision of emergency and critical services), contingency arrangements have to be put in place for each period of industrial action. These arrangements inevitably result in additional costs to the Service. The report submitted included a table showing the costs incurred, however, whilst some costs are easily identifiable, others are not and estimates have therefore been used. The additional cost to the Service for contingency arrangements during industrial action has amounted to £208,990.66. This amount takes account of the savings made from the deduction of wages from employees for strike action.

14.3 Members expressed concern about the cost of the military assistance and were reminded that they had been advised of this issue under part II conditions in previous meetings. The CFO went on to explain that at the beginning of the industrial dispute, WG had contacted all three FRAs in Wales offering military assistance. Having implemented the Service's business continuity plans, the CFO had realised that military support was not required and informed WG. However, by this time military personnel had received operational training and the cost of this, approximately £435k, was to be shared between the three FRAs. Members requested that a letter be sent to the WG expressing their concerns about this issue.

- 14.4 **RESOLVED to**
- (i) note the contents of the report;**
  - (ii) ask the Clerk to draft a letter, to be shared with members, and then sent to WG expressing concerns as discussed at the meeting.**

15 MINUTES FOR INFORMATION

15.1 The minutes of the Executive Panel meeting held on 21 July 2014 were submitted for information.

15.2 **RESOLVED to note the minutes for information.**

Members had discussed the industrial action and it was noted that there was no more information to be shared in part II and therefore the Chair drew the meeting to a close and thanked everyone for attending.