

**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
EXECUTIVE PANEL**

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 4th February 2013 at Fire and Rescue Headquarters, St Asaph. Meeting commenced at 2pm.

PRESENT

Cllr A M Jones (Chair)	Anglesey County Council
Cllr M Ll Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr R Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr A Evans	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr W I Hughes	Anglesey County Council
Cllr P R Lewis	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr P Pemberton	Wrexham County Borough Council

ALSO PRESENT:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); G Owens (Deputy Monitoring Officer); D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); P Claydon and R Simmons (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); G Brandrick (Senior Fire Safety Manager); R Fairhead (Senior Operations Manager); G W Griffiths (Senior Development Manager); L Roberts (Senior Control and Business Continuity Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer). [K Finch (Treasurer) was present for the discussion on Wrexham fire and ambulance station project.]

OBSERVER: Cllr J R Skelland (Wrexham County Borough Council).

Apologies:

Cllr B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
Cllr H McGill	Flintshire County Council
Cllr P W Owen	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr W R Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr W T Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council

The Chair welcomed Cllr Richard Davies to his first meeting. Cllr Davies has replaced Cllr Alice Jones as the Independent representative from Denbighshire County Council.

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

1.1 The Deputy Clerk provided advice regarding Members from Wrexham County Borough Council participating in the discussion on the Wrexham fire and ambulance project under part II of the agenda. Members must declare at least a personal interest and should there be any discussion regarding purchasing land, Members would need to declare a prejudicial and personal interest.

2 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

2.1 None.

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19TH NOVEMBER 2012

2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 19th November were approved as a correct record.

3 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 9.1 Atal Tân – The CFO advised Members that the invitation to the Chief Executive of Atal Tân was in hand.

4 RURAL FIRE COVER REVIEW PRESENTATION

4.1 ACFO Simmons gave Members a presentation on rural fire cover review. The rural fire cover review will be an important piece of work for the Improvement Plan Working Group as it considers future budget issues and objectives. The issue of providing fire cover in rural areas had featured strongly in the recent public consultation on the 2013/14 improvement objectives.

4.2 Firefighters operating the retained duty system (RDS) make up 66 % of the Service's operational personnel and operate the majority of the Service's front line appliances (83%). Therefore, North Wales is essentially a retained service supported by wholetime personnel which is why the sustainability of the RDS is so significant for the Service.

4.3 ACFO Simmons explained that RDS firefighters are expected to be available for up to 120 hours per week to be recognised as semi-retained and 120 hours per week to be a fully-retained firefighter. RDS firefighters are paid a retainer fee and in North Wales earned in total an average of £7,000 in 2012/13. It was noted that the current contractual arrangements are restrictive to the individual, the primary employer and the Service but that these were set nationally by the National Joint Committee and could not be changed. It was also highlighted that there is no difference in the kit provision, the training and development or the deployment of firefighters by virtue of their contract status.

4.4 Various reviews of the retained duty system in the UK have been undertaken since 1997 but with no real solution identified. The main issues of concern are around recruitment, sustainability and availability especially during the daytime. As part of its financial strategy the Authority, with the co-operation of the FBU, has changed its wholetime duty rostering system which meant 22 fewer posts were required. In order to avoid compulsory redundancies, an operational resource pool was created with the 22 firefighters being available to ensure that emergency cover was available across North Wales.

- 4.5 The future challenge is to provide a sustainable response service despite the social, economic and demographic challenges. The RDS was established in 1947 when people lived and worked in the same area, this no longer applies and therefore it is difficult to attract suitable candidates that are available to be deployed on an on-call basis. As a consequence of the current economic situation and therefore a restrictive budget, it is impossible to increase the attractiveness of the role from a financial perspective.
- 4.6 ACFO Simmons concluded that part of the work to be undertaken on the rural fire cover review will be to influence the debate on national conditions of service to allow for less restrictive contracts and allow for more flexible deployment of personnel but in the meantime medium term solutions need to be created and agreed to deal with rural fire cover.
- 4.7 Cllr P R Lewis agreed with the conclusion and asked whether RDS firefighters gave specific reasons for leaving. The CFO explained that he sees every resignation and that the overwhelming reason is a change in the primary employment. Previously the Service has tried to accommodate those that wanted to change their availability due to work commitments but recently the Service has taken a more robust approach to the individuals who are changing patterns and in some cases have had to refuse requests to change availability.
- 4.8 As it is a nationwide problem, Cllr Lewis asked if it was possible to offer a different type of contract in order to attract more candidates which would possibly help fill the gaps. Cllr Pemberton commented that the financial reward was very small for the amount of time that had to be committed to the RDS. It was explained that due to the current conditions of service set nationally, the only contracts permitted are those up to 120 hours or 120 hours therefore making it difficult to attract people who may possibly be willing to provide cover for fewer hours.
- 4.9 The DCFO commented that now that the Service is more successful in preventing fires there are fewer incidents per year therefore lowering the number of calls-outs which has a knock-on effect on the amount of money RDS firefighters are able to claim in addition to the retainer fee. The CFO added that regardless of the fact that there were fewer call-outs RDS personnel had always been very supportive of the prevention agenda.
- 4.10 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

5 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

- 5.1 The DCFO introduced the report which provided information relating to the Service's activity and monitoring performance against improvement objectives, covering the period from April to December 2012.

- 5.2 There had been a reduction in the overall number of accidental fires in dwellings compared to the same period in 2011/12, but an increase in the number of people sustaining injuries at these fires. However, more people had been able to escape unharmed and unaided and this could, in part, be attributed to more people having an early warning from a working smoke alarm and a rehearsed escape plan tailored to their needs.
- 5.3 31% of home fire safety checks were completed following a referral from a partner organisation, which helps high risk groups to stay safer in their homes. The Service had therefore exceeded its own target of 25% for such referrals.
- 5.4 There was a reduction in the overall number of incidents attended, and a reduction of 30% in the total number of fires. The biggest reduction had been in secondary fires, which can be attributed to the successful grass burning campaign and also the wet weather which meant fewer accidental or deliberate grass fires. Staff from the Service had attended farmers' markets to engage with landowners/farmers and ask them to inform the Service before they start burning grass.
- 5.5 The Service is attending fewer road traffic collisions due to the development of a more sophisticated relationship with partners whereby further information is gained to ensure attendance is required. However, the number of other special service incidents has increased due to the flooding incidents which has caused a 59% increase in 'special service incidents other than RTCs'.
- 5.6 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**
- 6 IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES 2013-14
- 6.1 The report was presented to provide a summary and analysis of the responses to the Authority's consultation on its draft Improvement Objectives 2013-14 and to recommend amendments to the draft Improvement Plan 2013-14 for presentation to the full Fire and Rescue Authority for final approval at its next meeting in March 2013.
- 6.2 The DCFO explained that the improvement plan consultation document approved by the October 2012 Authority meeting had been published for consultation for 12 weeks from 15th October 2012 to 7th January 2013. An online survey had been used for the first time which had proved quite effective and will become part of the consultation strategy in future. Around 170 different comments, views and questions were received during the consultation.
- 6.3 During the course of the consultation period, work was completed by the three Welsh fire and rescue services to develop a common call-handling target for all three Control functions. As this all-Wales target has now been agreed, Members have the option of replacing the draft North Wales call handling target with this more recent call-handling target.

6.4 **RESOLVED to approve the production of a final draft of the Improvement Plan 2013-14 based on the same proposals contained in the consultation draft but replacing the draft North Wales call handling target with the new all-Wales call handling target. The final draft Improvement Plan 2013-14 will be presented for approval by the full Fire and Rescue Authority at its March 2013 meeting.**

7 MEMBERSHIP OF IMPROVEMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP

7.1 Members were asked to agree the membership of the Improvement Plan working group.

7.2 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the working group will deal with the detailed work in connection the Authority's planning and budget process before submission to the Executive Panel and subsequently the full Authority for final approval. The Authority is about to embark on a new 3-year period in terms of the financial strategy, therefore the working group will be drawing up the medium to long term plan for the Authority ensuring it is sustainable and able to resource the Service's work in future.

7.3 Due to the importance of the work involved for the working group, Members were invited to agree that the complete membership of the Executive Panel become members of the working group.

7.4 **RESOLVED to agree that the full membership of the Executive Panel becomes the membership of the IP Working Group.**

8 COMMISSIONER'S FEEDBACK ON WELSH LANGUAGE ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

8.1 The report informed Members about the feedback received from the Welsh Language Commissioner in relation to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Service Welsh Language Monitoring Report 2011-12.

8.2 The Commissioner welcomed many aspects of the Authority's work in relation to the Welsh language and in particular was keen for the Service to maintain the proportion of bilingual home fire safety checks and the number of children receiving fire safety advice in Welsh.

8.3 The Commissioner has indicated that the current Welsh Language Scheme 2010-13 will be extended until the new statutory standards relating to the Welsh language come into effect in about two years' time.

8.4 Cllr P R Lewis asked if the requirement to attain level 2 Welsh language had had an impact on recruiting RDS firefighters. ACFO Simmons confirmed that this was not the case and that those joining the Service were offered any help possible to ensure they passed the level 2 Welsh test as the onus was on the Service to give as much help and support as needed. However, the ACFO acknowledged that there was no way of identifying those that had been dissuaded from applying because of the Welsh language. The Chief Fire Officer further explained that candidates can be deselected on the basis of failing English literacy skills test but not the Welsh test.

- 8.5 Cllr M Ll Davies congratulated the Service on receiving a complimentary report from the Commissioner.
- 8.6 **RESOLVED to note the progress made in relation to the Welsh Language Scheme and the Service's commitment to ensuring it continues to monitor progress in this area.**

PART II

The report to be discussed in part II related to the on-going Wrexham fire and ambulance station project. There are contractual and other matters those that may cause people to reveal harmful information to the process therefore it is necessary to hold the discussion in part II.

9 WREXHAM FIRE AND AMBULANCE PROJECT

- 9.1 The report was provided to update Members on the proposed joint fire and ambulance station development in Wrexham.
- 9.2 The Deputy Clerk reiterated his advice regarding the code of conduct and that Members from Wrexham County Borough Council must declare at least a personal interest and should there be any discussion regarding purchasing land, Members would need to declare a prejudicial and personal interest. However, Members could fully participate in the discussion. Cllr Skelland, attending as an observer and as Chair of the Audit Committee, could participate with the agreement of the Chair. The advice was noted and Cllr P Pemberton, Cllr A Evans and Cllr J R Skelland therefore declared a personal interest in the report to be discussed.
- 9.3 **RESOLVED to recommend to the full Authority meeting on 18th March 2013 that:**
- (i) the Authority withdraws from the project unless it is able to bring it within budget and able to deliver a station which meets the Authority's needs within a definitive period and commences work on a viable alternative, namely a redevelopment of the Bradley Road site or any other additional, suitable, site available in the Wrexham area;**
 - (ii) an external auditor is appointed to undertake an audit of the project to date.**
- 9.4 **Members noted that this option carries both financial and reputational risks to the Authority based on the factors highlighted in paragraphs 14 – 16 of the report presented to the Executive Panel.**