

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** held on **Monday 15 April 2024** virtually via **Zoom**. Meeting commenced at **09.30hrs**.

Councillor

Dylan Rees (Chair)
Bryan Apsley
Marion Bateman
Carol Beard
Tina Claydon
Sharon Doleman
Jeff Evans
Chrissy Gee
Alan Hughes
Chris Hughes
Gareth R Jones
Marc Jones
Gwynfor Owen
Beverley Parry-Jones
Arwyn Herald Roberts
Austin Roberts
Gareth A Roberts
Paul Rogers (from 09:39)
Gareth Sandilands
Dale Selvester
Rob Triggs
Michelle Walker
Mark Young

Representing

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

Also present:

Dawn Docx
Stewart Forshaw
Helen MacArthur
Justin Evans
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
Tracey Williams
George Jones
Lisa Allington

Chief Fire Officer (CFO)
Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Treasurer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Head of Corporate Communications
Atebol Translation Services
Members' Services

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
John Brynmor Hughes
John Ifan Jones
Rondo Roberts
Adele Davies-Cooke

Representing

Flintshire County Council
Gwynedd Council
Anglesey County Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Flintshire County Council

ABSENT

Councillor

Representing

The above apologies were offered and accepted.

The Chair asked for a moments silence in order to remember Rob Outram, the Deputy Head of Fleet and Engineering, who passed away suddenly on 3 April 2024. The Chair confirmed that a condolence card had been sent on behalf of the Authority and that he would also be attending the funeral.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 No notice of urgent matters had been received.

4 MINUTES OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 22 JANUARY 2024

4.1 The minutes of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) meeting held on 22 January 2024 were submitted for approval.

4.2 It was noted that Cllr. Carol Beard had been present at the meeting and had not offered apologies, as reflected in the minutes.

4.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **approve the FRA minutes from 22 January 2024 as a true and correct record of the meetings held, with the above amendment having been made.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 There were no matters arising.

6 CHAIR'S REPORT

6.1 It was noted that a written paper had been provided to Members to inform them on the meetings and events attended by the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority in their official capacities between January and March 2024.

6.2 The Chair noted that a number of meetings had been held with Hannah Blythyn, Deputy Minister for Social Partnership, over the last quarter. However, following the appointment of Vaughan Gething as First Minister for Wales, the responsibility for Fire and Rescue had been moved to the Cabinet Secretary for Housing, Local Government, and Planning, Julie James.

6.3 **RESOLVED to:**

i) Note the information provided within the paper.

7 INDEPENDENT CULTURAL REVIEW

7.1 The CFO presented the Independent Cultural Review paper which provided Members with an update as to the cultural journey of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) and progress towards commissioning an Independent Cultural Review. This followed the verbal update already given at a previous meeting.

7.2 One Member asked how Members might be involved in the Independent Review and the CFO responded that whilst this paper formed the official notice of the review, regular updates would be provided and a formal briefing would be given at the Full Authority meeting in October 2024.

7.3 Concern was expressed around the potential cost of the review. It was felt that a lot of work had already been carried out around culture within the Service and that movement in the right direction was being made. It was therefore asked whether Julie James may overturn this decision. The CFO confirmed that controlling costs was a priority and conversations would be held with Julie James at the upcoming Social Partnership Forum on 8 May, which would be attended by both the CFO and the Chair, in order to clarify her stance on the issue.

7.4 The Chair drew Members' attention to the area of the paper which stated that the review would be limited to experiences within a set timeframe, which was yet to be agreed.

7.5 A Member felt that the FBU should be heavily involved in this review as part of the Service's commitment to work more closely with them. At this juncture the Chair noted that since last FRA, both the Chair and the Secretary of the FBU had stepped down and formal ratification of the new Chair and Secretary was being awaited. The CFO confirmed that involvement from all Unions would be sought during this process.

- 7.6 A Member asked if there was a rationale behind setting a timeframe for the review as they were concerned that some voices may not be heard as a result. The CFO responded that there were mechanisms in-house to deal with historical issues, but that anything historical that remained ongoing would be covered by the review.
- 7.7 It was asked who would be appointing the Independent Reviewer and the CFO responded that this would be within the gift of the two Fire Authorities. However, it had been stipulated by the Welsh Government that this must not be someone with any current or previous connection with either service. A Member felt that it was also important that the successful appointment must also have experience of the Emergency Services in order to fulfil the brief effectively.
- 7.8 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) Note the contents of the paper; and**
 - ii) approve in principle the creation of a reserve to fund the independent review and supporting roles within the Service.**

8 EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW (ECR) UPDATE

- 8.1 DCFO Forshaw delivered the ECR update which aimed to provide Members with the latest position on the progress being made by the newly formed ECR Task and Finish Group, established in response to the decision made by the Authority at its meeting on 18 December 2023 to develop a new permanent option for the provision of emergency cover across North Wales.
- 8.2 The Chair highlighted that the issues that had triggered this review remained and needed resolving.
- 8.3 It was asked whether any progress had been made in this area and the DCFO confirmed that the way that other fire and rescue services operated had been looked into and that the Working Group had come up with a number of ideas as a result. These were being refined and a viable option was hoped to be available to deliver to Members at the Full Authority meeting in July.
- 8.4 It was noted that the Task and Finish Group had been meeting in different locations and asked whether they had yet met in Southern Gwynedd, this being one of the areas that was underrepresented. The DCFO responded that he would ensure that this information was disseminated to Members.

- 8.5 A Member asked how many options were being developed for presentation to the Authority and the DCFO responded that the aspiration was to provide one viable option that was not too fundamentally different to that presented to the Authority previously. If it were to be, there was the potential that further public consultation may be necessary.
- 8.6 The CFO noted that Mid and West Wales were currently carrying out an emergency cover review in order to address the geographical areas that they were unable to provide guaranteed cover for. Between the two services, this was obviously a bigger issue as there was a significant combined area across Wales that did not have guaranteed cover.
- 8.7 A Member asked what work had taken place between relevant officers with regards to finance for the potential new option. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that any option put forward would be within the available cost envelope.
- 8.8 The DCFO also noted that should the option put forward in July be accepted by the Authority, it may be possible to implement it ready for the start of the new financial year, and budget setting could therefore take place with that in mind.

8.9 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) Note the engagement of all stakeholders on the ECR Task and Finish Group to work together to develop options that deliver improvements in emergency cover for the communities of North Wales; and**
- ii) note the progress made by the Task and Finish Group to date.**

9 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2024-2029

- 9.1 DCFO Forshaw presented to Members the proposed 2024-2029 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy (the EDI strategy). It presents our commitments relating to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and sets out how we propose to meet them.
- 9.2 The Chair noted that this strategy had already been scrutinised by the Executive Panel, and that a Members' EDI Champion had been appointed in Cllr Sharon Doleman. Cllr Doleman was thanked for her commitment to the role.

9.3 A Member asked how communication could be improved in order to ensure that all Members were aware of the great work been carried out across the Service. The DCFO responded that this would be part of the new EDI Champion's responsibility. Updates were also regularly given via the Weekly Brief; however, it was acknowledged that further work could be carried out in this area.

9.4 A Member noted that the essential criteria within all Service job descriptions may require review in line with the EDI Strategy in order to ensure that no person was being excluded from being able to apply for reasons which may relate to a protected characteristic.

9.5 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the content of the paper; and**
- ii) approve the proposed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2029.**

10 NORTH WALES HEALTHY TRAVEL CHARTER

10.1 ACFO Evans presented the North Wales Healthy Travel Charter paper which set out the obligations as prescribed in the North Wales Healthy Travel Charter (the Charter), and the practical considerations of implementing them.

10.2 The Chair noted that this paper had already been scrutinised by the Executive Panel.

10.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) endorse the ratification of the North Wales Healthy Travel Charter, under the following terms:**
 - The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) be delegated to sign the Charter on behalf of the Authority;**
 - The Environment and Climate Change Manager be designated the Single Point of Contact (SPoC) for the scheme; and**
 - Compliance reporting to the Flintshire and Wrexham Public Service Board to be made by ACFO Justin Evans.**

11 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2023/24

11.1 The Treasurer presented to Members the Provisional Outturn 2023/24 paper which provided an update on the revenue and capital expenditure forecast for 2023/24, as at 29 February 2024.

11.2 It was noted that this paper had not previously been scrutinised by Members.

- 11.3 A Member asked whether there was any scrutiny with regards to the capital expenditure and ACFO MacArthur responded that the Budget Scrutiny Working Group would be responsible for this.
- 11.4 It was noted that funding had been withdrawn by the Welsh Government for the Firelink project. ACFO MacArthur advised Members that as this was a national project, it remained a significant challenge across all fire and rescue services. A national legal challenge on the increase in costs had also been commenced.
- 11.5 A Member asked what steps were being taken to remedy the issues being experienced with the fire kits. ACFO MacArthur responded that it was important that the Service was able to provide appropriate kit to its workforce and that at the current time, this was being carefully managed.
- 11.6 It was queried whether fire kits were reusable and responded that they were carefully checked when laundered and providing they were within their lifespan, they were then reallocated.
- 11.7 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the draft revenue and capital outturn projections for the 2023/24 financial year as detailed within the paper;**
 - ii) note the risks associated with inflation and supply chain issues; and**
 - iii) approve the use of earmarked and general fund reserves.**

12 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/25

- 12.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 which aimed to inform Members of the Authority of their responsibilities arising from the Localism Act 2011 (the Act). Key areas of the paper were highlighted.
- 12.2 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the requirements of the Localism Act 2011; and**
 - ii) approve the Pay Policy Statement for the 2024/25 financial year.**

13 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (TMS) 2024-25

- 13.1 The Treasurer presented the Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) 2024-25, the purpose of which was to present to Members the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for the period April 2024 – March 2025.
- 13.2 It was noted that this paper had previously been scrutinised in Audit Committee.

13.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **approve the Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25;**

14 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2024-34

14.1 ACFO MacArthur explained to Members that the purpose of this paper was to present the proposed Capital Strategy for the period April 2024 to March 2034, and provide details and explanations of the proposed Strategy.

14.2 **RESOLVED TO:**

- i) **approve the Capital Strategy for 2024-2034;**

15 FINANCIAL RESERVES STRATEGY

15.1 ACFO MacArthur presented an updated version of the Financial Reserves Strategy (the Strategy) to Members of the Authority.

15.2 The Chair thanked the Treasurer, ACFO MacArthur and the Audit Committee for the excellent work carried out in relation to these financial papers.

15.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Approve the Financial Reserves Strategy at Appendix 1, as a basis for managing the Authority's usable reserves.**

16 STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

16.1 The Clerk presented Members with the standards Committee's Annual Report 2023/24.

16.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Note the content of the annual report of the Standards Committee.**

16i ROLLING REVIEW OF COUNCILLORS' CODE OF CONDUCT

16i.1 The Clerk explained that the purpose of this paper was to give Members the opportunity to review the councillors' Code of Conduct (the Code) to ensure that it remain pertinent and up to date, especially in light of recommendations made within the Penn Review.

16i.2 The CFO noted that this referred to Members of the Authority rather than employees of the Service.

16i.3 A Member asked what the process would be in the event that a Member had received a caution from the police but had not officially been charged. The Clerk responded that as cautions were usually in relation to less serious offences and did not constitute a criminal conviction, there would be no responsibility for this to be reported.

16i.4 The Chair thanked the Members of the Standards Committee for their very thorough work.

16i.4 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Include all the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 within the prohibition on discrimination; and**
- ii) **Amend the requirement to report criminal behaviour by others to also include reporting oneself where a councillor receives a conviction (other than a fixed penalty notice)**

17 URGENT MATTERS

17.1 There were no urgent matters to consider.

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 15 July 2024.

Meeting closed: 11:19