

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the Executive Panel meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 21st May 2007 at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, St. Asaph. Meeting commenced at 2pm.

Present:

Councillor

T Roberts (Chairman)
E C George (Vice-Chairman)

R D Peacock (substitute)
J M Vaughan
J A Smith
D Barratt
E F Evans
E Morgan Jones
W T Owen
G M Craddock
M Williams
J A Roberts

Representing

Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council

Conwy County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Gwynedd Council
Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Ynys Môn County Council

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); I R Miller (Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); C Enness (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); P S Claydon (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery); C Hanks (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Support); D Docx (Assistant Chief Officer, Finance and Procurement); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); W A Murphy (Senior Operations Manager); G Brandrick (Service Development Manager); K Hughes (Senior Fire Safety Manager); D G Roberts (Retained Duty System Project Manager); L Roberts (Fire Control Manager); R Jones (Chief Officer's Advisory Team Support Officer); S Forrest (Treasurer's Department, Conwy County Borough Council); K Williams (Principal Auditor, Conwy County Borough Council); S Roberts (Head of Facilities Management); R Fairhead (Chief Fire Officer's Task Group Member); G Watson (Corporate Communications Manager) and Rh Evans (Member Liaison Officer).

PART I

1) Apologies

Councillor

S Frobisher
W J Chorlton

Representing

Denbighshire County Council
Ynys Môn County Council

Prior to the commencement of business the Chairman paid tribute to the late Councillor S C Jones who passed away during April. Councillor Jones had been a highly regarded and much valued member of the Authority since its establishment in 1996. She had also been a member of the Executive Panel. Members and officers stood in silence as a mark of respect.

The Chief Fire Officer introduced Mr Richard Fairhead to members. Mr Fairhead was at present a member of the Chief Fire Officer's Task Group and would shortly be taking up another post in Headquarters as the Chief Officer's Advisory Team Support Officer. Members were also informed that the Mr Dai Roberts, currently the Retained Duty System Project Manager, would be retiring during July after more than 30 years of distinguished service. Members and officers conveyed their gratitude to him for his service and their best wishes to him for the future.

2) Notice of Urgent Matters

Members were informed by the Chairman that no items had been submitted to him or the Clerk for consideration.

3) Minutes

The following minutes were submitted:

- i. Executive Panel meeting held on 5th March 2007

Resolved: - to approve the minutes as a true and correct record of proceedings.

4) Matters Arising

No matters arose from the minutes submitted.

5) Proposals for the Draft Risk Reduction Plan 2008/09

Prior to the commencement of this item of business Councillors J Vaughan and J A Roberts declared an interest in the proposals relating to the provision of Operational Manager cover, as they are relatives of officers working the Flexible Duty System which provided operational officer cover. Both members were advised by the Clerk that they could remain present during the debate unless a matter arose during the discussion which may necessitate him to ask them to

leave the meeting for the remainder of the debate. Neither member participated in the discussion, or voted on the proposal, relating to the provision of Operational Officer cover.

The Chief Fire Officer briefed members on the information provided to the Risk Reduction Plan (RRP) Working Group at its meeting earlier that day before proceeding to summarise the Group's recommendations in relation to the proposals that the Executive Panel should include in the Authority's draft RRP Action Plan for 2008/09 prior to its submission to the Fire and Rescue Authority's June meeting for approval to go out for public consultation. It was:

Resolved: - that the draft RRP Action Plan for submission to the Fire and Rescue Authority on 18th June 2007 should include:

- i. details of a revised intense Community Fire Safety (CFS) strategy with the aim of reducing the number of fire deaths;***
- ii. details of the consultation that will be initiated on proposals to introduce a robust policy to reduce the number of false alarms from Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems, including a proposal to implement a progressive registration programme for automatic fire alarm systems;***
- iii. the proposed changes to the rostering procedures for Wholetime and Day-Crewed firefighters' that will be consulted upon: these changes to include the rostering of the correct number of staff required to cover ridership, the rostering of net contracts, reserve hours to be used to cover absences, the introduction of a 10 week shift pattern (to include the four days on four days off model) and that annual leave entitlement be built into the roster pattern;***
- iv. details of the recommended 'Dedicated Response Option' that will be pursued for the future provision of Operational Manager cover with a view to realising a more efficient use of resources in the longer term;***
- v. details of the enhancement of the Service's performance management framework and risk management arrangements;***
- vi. the estimated costings/anticipated efficiency savings of all proposals listed;***
- vii. that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman approve the draft 2008/09 RRP Action Plan prior to its submission to the Fire and Rescue Authority; and***
- viii. in the meantime, prior to the commencement of the public consultation stage, the Authority initiates an informal discussion on its proposals with the Welsh Assembly Government Minister that holds responsibility for fire and rescue services in Wales.***

6) Performance Monitoring

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) introduced her report (previously circulated) which presented members with information relating to the Service's performance against the set performance indicators (PIs) during the 2006/07 reporting year. She explained that 14 out of the 20 performance

indicators the Service had set itself for 2006/07 had been met, with 2 out of the remaining 4 showing considerable improvement on the previous year's results. Members' attention was drawn to a number of PIs contained in the report. These included a slight increase in the number of primary fires, attributable to deliberate fires. The number of both primary and secondary deliberate fires had shown an increase on the previous year's figures. It was therefore important that partnership working and multi-agency approaches were fully utilised with a view to reducing the number of these types of fires. In response to a request from the Vice Chairman the Deputy Chief Fire Officer undertook to obtain information from the Arson Reduction Team (ART) on the number of deliberate fires in abandoned cars.

Members were informed that contrary to the statistics on the number of deaths due to accidental dwelling fires, which had shown a sharp increase during the year, the statistics relating to injuries and escapes from accidental fires in dwellings were encouraging. These statistics would be reflected in the findings of the Chief Fire Officer's Task Group report on fire deaths, due to be published the following week. It was also encouraging to report that the Service received fewer malicious false alarm calls during 2006/07 and that the number of attendances to false alarms from Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) was lower than the previous year's figure. In response to a question on how officers were progressing in their discussions with NHS establishments with a view to realising an improvement in the management of their fire alarm systems, the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) advised that a policy was currently being compiled which would see the introduction of a system that would entail allocating an Unique Reference Number (URN) to each separate alarm system within a complex, such as a hospital, which in turn would allow for better management of alarm systems. He explained that there had been a mixed response from the NHS establishments to this proposal and that, although some were supportive, the individuals who served on the working group had no control over their organisation's finances and this could therefore fetter progress on the matter. It was pleasing to report that this year, for the first time, the Service had recorded that a working smoke alarm was fitted and had activated in over 50% of dwelling fires which the Service had attended. Members were advised that the Chief Fire Officer's Task Group report would provide statistics on various matters, such as how North Wales compared with other areas on the number of dwellings fitted with smoke alarms. In reply to a question on whether the Service kept a record of individuals who had refused a free home fire safety check (HFSC) the Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that work was currently underway on implementing a recording system for refusals.

In relation to the number of working days/shifts lost to sickness officers were pleased to report that, although still above target, the Service had shown an improvement against all PIs in this area. It was also noted that the targets set for this particular area were extremely stringent. Unfortunately, due to a redistribution of duties in the Finance Department the Service had not been able to meet the target set for the payment of undisputed invoices within 30 days. Members:

Resolved: - to note the contents of the performance monitoring report.

7) Regulatory Plan 2006/07

The Chairman welcomed Mr Matthew Edwards, Project Manager, from the Wales Audit Office (WAO) to the meeting to present the External Auditor's report on the Regulatory Plan 2006/07 (previously circulated). Mr Edwards advised that the Report summarised the work the WAO had undertaken with the Authority during the last financial year. He explained that the Introduction to the report detailed the changes that would arise with the introduction of the Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) for fire and rescue authorities. In addition, from the 2006/07 financial year onwards, the Authority would be required to approve its annual Statement of Accounts by the 30th September in the following fiscal year instead of the 31st October. Prior to explaining the anticipated fees payable and the reason for an 8% increase in the fees, Mr Edwards detailed various aspects of WAO's work with the Authority during the 2006/07 audit year, all of which were listed in the report. These areas ranged from the Financial Accounts Audit, Value for Money Arrangements, Inspection and other regulatory activity. It was also noted that an error had occurred in the numbering of the 'Exhibit' boxes. The Panel:

Resolved: - to note the contents of the report.

8) Wales Programme for Improvement in 2007/08

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) introduced her report (previously circulated) which informed members of the progress made in relation to the introduction of the Wales Programme for Improvement for Fire and Rescue Authorities (WPI-FRA) in Wales in 2006/07, including the requirements for performance reporting. She explained that the Welsh Assembly Government had, in March 2007, issued a draft WPI-FRA Guidance for consultation with responses required by 2nd April. Due to the extremely tight deadline for responses officers had responded on the Authority's behalf. In their response officers had stressed the importance of keeping the Risk Reduction Plan (RRP) and the Improvement Plan as two separate plans, as the RRP was a public document whilst the Improvement Plan was an internal document and tool. The formal consultation on the proposed suite of performance indicators (PIs), although published at the end of March, had been delayed until after the elections to the National Assembly. It was:

Resolved: - to note the progress being made by the Welsh Assembly towards introducing the Wales Programme for Improvement for Fire and Rescue Authorities, including the national suite of performance indicators for fire and rescue services.

9) VAT Fuel Receipts for the Purpose of Paying Mileage Allowance to Members and Officers

The Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement) introduced her report (previously circulated) which, in response to members' requests at the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 18th December 2006, detailed the administrative and other issues which had come to light during the first twelve months of the requirement to produce VAT fuel receipts to substantiate claims for mileage expenses. She explained that the purpose of the report was to seek members' views on how to proceed with the administration of these claims in future. Members were briefed on the background to the report, the difficulties that had been encountered by both members and officers since the introduction of the new procedures and the options that were available for the future administration of the mileage expenses scheme. A number of members were of the view that by approving Option 3, although ceasing to reclaim VAT on mileage paid to members and officers, the Authority would be making more effective and efficient use of personnel's time. Councillor J Vaughan was of the view that the Authority should continue with its current policy of requiring VAT receipts and apply the rules stringently. In reply to a request for advice, the Clerk said that the total amount of VAT reclaimed annually, approximately £6.5k in 2006/07, was nominal in comparison to the Authority's overall budget. He advised members to bear in mind the principles of Best Value when coming to a decision on the matter. It was important that a balance was struck between the cost effectiveness of administering the current procedure and the income it generated, and whether this equated to an efficient use of resources. Members unanimously:

Resolved: - based on a cost benefit analysis, not to reclaim VAT on mileage allowances paid to members and officers.

10) Presentation on the Service's Environmental Management

The Chairman welcomed Ms Anna Pretious and Mr Philip Morris, Environmental and Energy Conservation Manager and Engineer with the Service's Facilities Management Department, to the meeting to give members a presentation on the Management Review of the Service's Environmental Management System. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation Ms Pretious and Mr Morris gave an overview of the process of establishing an Environmental Management System, detailed the work undertaken to date and the issues that had to be considered as part of the Review, before summarising the Review's findings and detailing the Environmental Aspects Register that would be compiled for both the St. Asaph Headquarters site and Workshops and Stores site at Llandudno Junction. Prior to answering members' questions Mr Morris listed the various stages which had to be completed before the Service could expect to receive Level 3 accreditation under the Green Dragon Environmental Standard. Officers were aiming for the Service to be in a position to receive this accreditation by July 2008.

3.10pm: Councillor J Vaughan left the meeting and the Treasurer joined the meeting at this juncture.

Answering members' questions officers advised that the Facilities Management Department was collaborating with all the local authorities in the area on issues such as waste disposal and energy procurement. They also advised that there were health and safety issues involved with the capture and storage of rain water for Service use, and that public buildings would soon become subject to energy performance ratings. Officers agreed to Councillor J A Smith's request that a copy of the presentation be sent out to all Panel members. The Chairman thanked Ms Pretious and Mr Morris for their presentation and for answering members' questions.

3.20pm: Councillors W T Owen and E Morgan Jones left the meeting at this juncture.

11) Extensions of Sick Pay

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced his report (previously circulated) informing members of the decisions taken by the Chief Fire Officer following consultation with the Chairman in respect of the granting of extensions of sick pay. Members:

Resolved: - to note the report

12) Internal Audit Strategy 2004 to 2008

The Treasurer introduced the Head of Audit and Procurement Service's report (previously circulated) detailing the Authority's Internal Audit Strategy for the period 2004-2008. Prior to presenting the Internal Audit Needs Assessment and Audit Plan for 2007/08 the Treasurer informed the Panel about the overall strategy. He also briefed the Panel on the statutory requirement that compelled the Authority to have an Internal Audit function before proceeding to define the function's role, objectives and its relationship with both officers and members of the Authority. Members were also given an overview of how the Audit Service was delivered and were advised that Mr Keith Williams, Conwy County Borough Council's Principal Auditor, was on hand to answer their questions. The Panel:

Resolved: - to accept the Internal Audit Strategy 2004 to 2008.

13) Summary of Internal Audit Activity 2006/07 and Needs Assessment and Draft Audit Plan for 2007/08

The Treasurer introduced the Head of Audit and Procurement Service's report (previously circulated) which summarised the level of Internal Audit work that had taken place during 2006/07 and detailed the Internal Audit Needs Assessment and draft Internal Audit Plan for 2007/08. He explained that the report detailed the legislative and procedural background relating to the

internal audit function. In addition it included information on the categories into which internal audit work was divided, details of the reviews undertaken in 2006/07 along with the resulting audit opinion and summary of recommendations. The draft annual audit plan for 2007/08, which had been drawn up in consultation with the Service's management team, was attached to the report for members' approval. The Clerk enquired, although they had been denoted with the letter 'A' as areas of high risk', why no audit days had been allocated in the 2007/08 draft plan for audit work to be carried out in the majority of these high risk areas. Mr Keith Williams, Principal Auditor, replied that this was due to a lack of resources and pressure from the WAO. The Treasurer advised that in future years the key detailing the risk rating categorisation would be included at the beginning of the draft audit plan document rather than at the end. Members:

Resolved: - to note the summary of Internal Audit activity for 2006/07 and to approve the Needs Assessment and draft Internal Audit Plan for 2007/08.

14) Internal Audit Annual Statement of Assurance

Mr Keith Williams, the Principal Auditor, introduced the Head of Audit and Procurement Service's report (previously circulated) which detailed, in accordance with Accounts and Audit Regulations and in preparation for the Statement of Internal Control (SIC), the review of the effectiveness of the Authority's system of Internal Control. The presentation of this report had become a requirement under CIPFA's 'Code of Practice for Internal Audit in Local Government in the UK 2006'. Mr Williams referred members to the document 'The Role of Internal Audit', annexed to the report, which contained the Annual Statement of Assurance. The Panel was reminded by the Clerk that receiving and approving the Annual Statement of Assurance formed part of the Panel's recently extended remit, which now included powers relating to dealing with certain audit matters. In reply to an enquiry from the Vice-Chairman the Clerk and Treasurer confirmed that, although the WAO had suggested a stand-alone audit committee be established, they were both of the view given the size of the Authority and its overall budget that utilising the Executive Panel as an audit committee was by far a more efficient use of resources. Local authorities on the other hand were much bigger organisations and therefore executive and audit functions needed to be separate. It was:

Resolved: - to accept the Internal Audit Annual Statement of Assurance and to utilise it as contributory evidence for inclusion in the 2006/07 Statement of Internal Control.

15) Urgent Matters

None.

16) Date(s) of future meetings

Following a discussion members:

Resolved: - to hold the next Executive Panel meeting at 10.30am on Wednesday, 25th July 2007 at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, St. Asaph.

The Chairman informed members that it was recommended that the remaining items of business on the meeting's agenda be discussed without the public or Press present. It was:

Resolved: - pursuant to Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act, 1972 that the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business because it was likely that there would be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 8, 9 and 10 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972.

PART II

Both reports submitted under Part II business had been classed as exempt from disclosure under paragraph 14 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

17) Capital Programme 2007/08

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) introduced his report (previously circulated) which updated members on the Facilities Management Department's capital programme for the 2007/08 financial year. Panel members were informed that the remodelling works at both Llanberis and Harlech fire stations were nearing completion. Enabling works had commenced at the Rhyl site in preparation for the building of the new community fire station. The completion date for the new fire station was anticipated to be the end of March 2008. Negotiations were still taking place with partner organisations regarding the proposed remodelling of the Ynys Môn County Safety Office at Llangefni. Similarly, negotiations were also proceeding with other organisations in relation to the proposal to relocate Wrexham fire station. Wrexham County Borough Council representatives on the Executive Panel were reminded by the Clerk of his letter, dated 5th October 2006, regarding the need for them to declare an interest in this matter and abstain from any future vote on the proposals. Councillors G M Craddock, E C George and M Williams declared an interest in the matter as county borough councillors representing the Wrexham unitary authority area on the Executive Panel. The Panel:

Resolved: - to note the contents of the report.

18) Five Year Capital Programme 2007 to 2012

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) introduced his report (previously circulated) which informed members of the Service's proposed capital programme for its estate for the next five years. Mr Stephen Roberts, Head of Facilities Management, briefed members on the report's contents which included issues that surrounded the management of such a diverse estate, the methodology used to identify the premises that required urgent investment and the criteria and weighting used to draw up and prioritise the sites that required investment over the coming five years. He explained that the annex to the report included an estimate of the financial amount of investment required on each project. Mr Roberts advised the Panel that, in addition to work that had been identified for specific sites, work was also required in order to ensure compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act and to address other equality issues at a number of Service establishments. He also stressed that, based on the estimated forecast for the capital budget from 2007 to 2012, there would be a shortfall between the amount required to complete the programme and the actual capital budget available for work on the estate. The Authority would therefore, in the future, have to decide whether to increase the Facilities Management's Capital Budget allocation or to defer some projects beyond the 5 year programme.

Councillor M Williams enquired whether the proposed Programme took account of environmental issues such as those highlighted in the earlier presentation on the Review of the Service's Environmental Management System. Mr Roberts advised that these issues had not been directly considered as part of the five year capital programme but that Part L of Building Regulations would cover the majority of them and that he would also be consulting the Environmental and Energy Conservation Engineer in relation to them. It was:

Resolved: - to note the contents of the report and approve the five year capital programme subject to sufficient funding being available in each financial year.

Meeting concluded at 3.45pm.