

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

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 27 October 2014 at Fire and Rescue Headquarters, St Asaph. Meeting commenced at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Cllr M LI Davies (Chair)	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr P R Lewis (Deputy Chair)	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr L W Davies	Anglesey County Council
Cllr R Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr R J Dutton	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr H McGuill	Flintshire County Council
Cllr R O Jones	Anglesey County Council
Cllr G Lowe	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr P W Owen	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr W R Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr W T Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr R E Parry	Conwy County Borough Council

ALSO PRESENT:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); G Owens (Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer); K Finch (Treasurer); D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); R Fairhead (Assistant Chief Fire Officer); G Brandrick (Senior Fire Safety Manager); G W Griffiths (Senior Development Manager); K Roberts (Senior Operations Manager); L Roberts (Senior Control and Business Continuity Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer).

1 APOLOGIES

Cllr B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
Cllr A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council
R Simmons	Assistant Chief Fire Officer

The Chair welcomed Cllr R J Dutton, Cllr R O Jones, Cllr G Lowe and S Millington (Area Manager Designate) to their first meeting of the Executive Panel.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

2.1 None

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 None

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 JULY 2014

4.1 The minutes of the last meeting were submitted for approval.

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

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 Fire and Rescue Services in Wales Project 2013 – Members of the three Welsh FRAs had previously decided not to have representation on the programme board, but the Chair explained that it had later been agreed, between the three Chairs, that the three CFOs would be observers on the board. However, the programme board and its original terms of reference had now changed into a working group to draft a new Fire and Rescue National Framework for the future. The three CFOs had attended the first meeting which set out the governance and structure of the working group. No further meetings had been held to date.

5.2 **RESOLVED to note the update.**

6 FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY BUDGET 2015-16

6.1 The Chief Fire Officer presented the report which asked Members to consider a range of budget options and provide advice on the way forward in preparation for the December meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority when the Authority is required to set its budget for 2015/16.

6.2 The CFO led Members through the report reminding them of the Authority's current position having frozen its budget for a fourth year and the potential short fall of approximately £3.3 million for the forthcoming five-year period. Members were advised that this figure was the equivalent of an increase of 10%, but could only be achieved with the equivalent of 25% of the operational workforce, involving closure of stations and removal of appliances.

6.3 It was noted that the Welsh Government is expecting the Welsh fire and rescue authorities to reduce its budget even more than local authorities because fire incidences are generally falling. Members were disappointed with this expectation as it appeared that the FRA was a victim of its own success in reducing fire incidents, injuries and deaths.

6.4 All local authorities in North Wales have received a presentation outlining the FRA's improvement objectives and a summary of the responses received at meetings was included in the report. Conwy CBC had received the presentation on 23 October and the CFO reported that the response at Conwy was similar to that of the other local authorities.

6.5 In response to a Member's question, it was confirmed by the Deputy Clerk that all Members are expected to act in the best interests of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.

- 6.6 Appendix 4 of the report detailed the unavoidable and discretionary funding pressures together with options of how to fund those pressures and the risk levels involved. Options involving closure of stations and removal of appliances were considered as medium to high risk and would involve compulsory redundancies. The procedure to close a station may take more than a year therefore no immediate savings would be forthcoming. Also, there is no national scheme for voluntary redundancy of firefighters and the Authority has no agreed policy on this matter.
- 6.7 The WG had advised that the revenue element of the community fire safety grant would be reduced by 52%. Members were reminded that they had previously agreed that grants are there for specific work and should a grant not be forthcoming then the work would also cease. The outcome would be for the FRA to apply for a reduced grant and that CFS work would have to be reduced accordingly.
- 6.8 Other options listed in appendix 4 were:
- further reduce the number of operational middle managers which would affect resilience and might also involve compulsory redundancies
 - reduce attendance to Automatic Fire Alarms incidents – this would entail taking an even more robust view of AFAs and this has already been done.
 - withdraw provision for non-statutory duties
 - stop funding Atal Tân.
- Members asked for further information about the above options.
- 6.9 In response to a Member's question about asset transfer route and transferring a fire station to the local community to be managed by volunteers, other members and the CFO were extremely concerned at this concept in terms of health and safety issues and due to the specialist nature of the fire and rescue work.
- 6.10 Members recognised that any resolutions and recommendations were only to give officers a steer for the December meeting and that they may have to be modified in light of responses received to the consultation exercise. Members were also reminded that should the FRA decide to increase the levy then all local authorities will be required to pay accordingly.
- 6.11 Having discussed the various issues and options at length, Members considered the funding pressures as set out in appendix 4 and it was **RESOLVED to**
- (i) recommend the following to the Fire and Rescue Authority:
- not to reduce the budget to the level of the Aggregate External Finance funding;
 - not to reduce the budget by 4% as per Welsh Government's expectations;
 - to note the reduction in the community safety grant – revenue at approximately £257k and capital at approximately £230k. Members were keen that the FRA submits a bid for the reduced CFS grant and that work is constructed accordingly with the caveat that the Phoenix project is given priority;
 - that, if necessary, the levy is increased by up to the equivalent of £1 per head of population.

- (ii) request that further information be presented to the next Authority meeting on the following options:
- further reduce operational middle managers posts
 - reduction in attendance to automatic fire alarms
 - no longer carry out non statutory duties
 - stop funding Atal Tân.
- (iii) hold an extraordinary meeting of the full Authority, specifically to discuss the budget issues and the information requested above. It was noted that this meeting will be held on 2nd December, 10am, at Conwy Business Centre.

7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

- 7.1 The Deputy Chief Fire Officer introduced the performance monitoring report and gave Members a detailed analysis of the performance information for the first half of the year from 1 April 2014 – 30 September 2014.
- 7.2 There had been a reduction in the number of accidental fires in dwellings compared to the same period in 2013/14 and more people were able to escape from an accidental fire unharmed and without the need for assistance. This could be attributed in part to the delivery of home fire safety checks and the vital advice provided during a visit on how to prevent a fire and should a fire occur how to exit the property safely.
- 7.3 The target of delivering 30,000 HFSCs was unlikely to be met this year given the funding difficulties and the impact of industrial action. There are also pressures on the voluntary organisations that are undertaking HFSCs which has meant a decrease in the numbers delivered. It was pleasing to note, however, that referrals are still being received from partner organisations and these are over 30% of all referrals received.
- 7.4 Overall there had been a reduction in the total number of fires attended but an increase in the number of fires in non-domestic properties compared to the same period in 2013-14; however, apart from this increase in 2014-15 there had been a continuous downward trend since 2008-09.
- 7.5 The number of deliberate fires had seen a steady reduction and this could be attributed in part to the work of the Arson Reduction Team. In terms of malicious false alarms, it was noted that as part of the school education programme, young people are informed that their mobile phones will be deactivated if they are found to be making these malicious calls.
- 7.6 In response to members' request for further information about accidental dwelling fires and the cause and room of origin, false alarms not attended and the total emergency calls during 2013-14 a supplementary information document was provided to Members for information.
- 7.7 **RESOLVED to note the contents of the performance monitoring report and the supplementary information provided for the first half of the 2014-15 financial year.**

8 JOINT PUBLIC SERVICE CENTRE PROJECT

- 8.1 ACFO Fairhead introduced the report which advised Members of the Joint Public Service Centre Project and highlighted North Wales Fire and Rescue Service's involvement.
- 8.2 The aim of the Joint Public Service Centre project is to merge the two fire control teams of Mid and West Wales and South Wales Fire and Rescue Services and to relocate the newly merged team to the South Wales Police emergency control room at Bridgend. This is to be known as the Public Service Centre.
- 8.3 ACFO Fairhead explained that the project had several key task areas and the two that are most risk critical for North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority are the procurement of a new command and control system for the south and north of Wales and business continuity.
- 8.4 An officer from North Wales has been seconded to the project to lead on the command and control system work stream and Members endorsed this secondment which will ensure protection of NWFRA's interests. It was agreed to invite Peter Davis to a future meeting to give a presentation on the work of the project.
- 8.5 **RESOLVED to note the progress of the Joint Public Services Centre Project.**

9 EMERGENCY SERVICE MOBILE COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME

- 9.1 The report presented informed Members about the Emergency Service Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP) and the potential risks of this national project involving all the emergency services across the UK. In all three Fire and Rescue Services in Wales, the provision of radio communication, through a nationally procured contract, will end in December 2016. A national replacement project known as the Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme has been established by Her Majesty's Government.
- 9.2 The DCFO explained that this was a risk critical project. Members were concerned to note the risks which included timescales not being met and that the new system may not deliver acceptable operational capability including coverage and resilience. One of the main concerns with timescales was that the system may not be installed in North Wales in time for the current contract ending and that this would mean negotiating an extension with the current contractor which is likely to be expensive. Given this critical risk, members considered it prudent to make an annual provision to meet costs that may occur but are currently unknown. It was also noted that the WG currently provides a grant towards the cost of the current system, however, the WG is in no position to guarantee that this grant will continue in future.
- 9.3 The National Issues Committee had received a report and discussed these concerns. Officers will be monitoring the situation closely and members will be kept informed of developments and any anticipated costs.

9.4 **RESOLVED to note the information provided and agree that funding is put aside into a provision to mitigate the extension of contract and/or transitional costs.**

10 CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE

10.1 The certificate of compliance issued by the Auditor General for Wales was presented to Members. Steve Barry from the Wales Audit Office was introduced to Members as he is the new Performance Lead Officer and will be attending future meetings.

10.2 The certificate of compliance replaced the improvement assessment letter and confirmed that the Authority had discharged its improvement reporting duties under the Local Government Measure 2009.

10.3 **RESOLVED to note the certificate of compliance.**

PART II - Pursuant to Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the press and public were asked to leave the meeting during consideration of the following item(s) of business because it is likely that there would be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in Paragraph(s) 12 to 18 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

11 BUSINESS CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT

11.1 The CFO updated Members about the latest developments with regard to industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) over pension reform. There had been no strike action since August. On 23 October 2014, information was received from the Welsh Government that the Minister for Public Services had contacted the FBU indicating a willingness to consult on issues. Currently there is no planned strike action in Wales.

11.2 **RESOLVED to note the information provided and that Members will be kept informed of any further developments.**