

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

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 21 July 2014 at Fire and Rescue Headquarters, St Asaph. Meeting commenced at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Cllr M Ll 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 B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
Cllr A Evans	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr J M Evans	Anglesey County Council
Cllr H McGuill	Flintshire County 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); R Simmons (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); Rh Williams (Corporate Communications Officer); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer).

1 APOLOGIES

Cllr D Kelly	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council
D Docx	Deputy Chief Fire Officer
R Fairhead	Assistant Chief Fire Officer

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

2.1 None

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 None

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 MAY 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 There were no matters arising.

6 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

6.1 The Corporate Planning Manager introduced the performance monitoring report and gave Members a detailed analysis of the performance information for the year 2013-14. It was noted that there had been an increase in incidents compared to the previous year but that 2012-13 had been an exceptional year with very low number of incidents and that 2013-14 figures reflected a more 'normal' picture of operational activity.

6.2 Although there had been an increase in accidental fires in dwellings, more people had been able to escape unharmed and unaided which could be attributed to properties having smoke alarms and people being more aware and having an escape plan in the event of a fire at their home. It was noted that there had been an increase in injuries from accidental dwelling fires across England and Wales but that the overall trend was showing a decrease when compared to the beginning of the century and now the figures seem to have reached a plateau.

6.3 The number of dwelling fires attended with no smoke alarm fitted had also seemed to plateau at around 15%-16%. However, this was better than the average UK figure of 30%. The Service had attended 130 (25%) dwelling fires where a smoke alarm was present but had not activated; having researched this issue it had been identified that in the majority of cases this was due to the smoke alarm not being close enough to the origin of the fire. Members asked about the causes of fires and where they started in a property and it was agreed to provide this information at the next meeting.

6.4 In terms of delivering home fire safety checks, partner organisations are able to target the most vulnerable people in the community and this aspect of partnership working has been extremely positive with 32% of the total 26,621 HFSCs delivered during the year being referrals from a partner organisation, exceeding the Service's target of 30%.

6.5 In the last four years there has been a year-on-year reduction in activity overall and the Service had attended 7% fewer incidents in 2013-14 compared to 2012-13. In comparison to other parts of England and Wales, NWFRS turns out to far fewer incidents due in part to fewer incidents but also because the Service will now explore which agency is the most suitable to attend an incident and whether the Service is required at all. There had been a substantial decrease in special service incidents compared to 2012-13 and compared to the 3-year average but these figures are difficult to predict as they tend to fluctuate depending on the weather conditions.

6.6 False alarms had seen a decrease of 5% compared to the previous year. Members were reminded about the call challenge policy where the control operators can challenge suspicious calls and this has proved to be successful in reducing the number of malicious false alarms that the Service attends.

6.7 Members discussed the report at length and questioned officers about its contents. Cllr Lewis thanked the Corporate Planning Manager for the detailed report and noted that it was pleasing that the 3-year average showed an improvement in the majority of performance areas recorded.

6.8 The CFO commented that the improvement over the years was due to the hard work of staff and it was noted that prevention does cost money and due to less resource being available for this work these figures may not be sustainable in the future.

6.9 **RESOLVED to note the contents of the performance monitoring report for 2013-14.**

7 ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT

7.1 The CFO introduced the Wales Audit Office's annual improvement report on NWFRA and invited Lisa Williams from the WAO to present the report to members. The report was essentially a summary of what the Authority had done in 2012-13 in terms of improvement planning and its plans for 2013-14 and 2014-15 which formed part of the WAO's forward looking assessment.

7.2 Ms Williams indicated that the report was positive and that planning arrangements were in place within the Authority and that it was likely to comply with arrangements to secure continuous improvement in 2014-15. There were two proposals for improvement: to strengthen the improvement planning process and to improve the assessment of performance report. However, in response to a Member's question, Ms Williams acknowledged that the discussion on the performance monitoring report demonstrated that members scrutinised the Authority's performance and did challenge officers about the information they were given.

7.3 The Chair thanked Ms Williams for the report and it was **RESOLVED to note the annual improvement report.**

8 WELSH LANGUAGE MONITORING REPORT

8.1 The Senior Training and Development Manager introduced the report which sought members' approval prior to its formal submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner. Each year, the Service is required to produce a detailed report which sets out progress made towards meeting the targets outlined in the Service's Welsh Language Scheme.

8.2 The Service has continued to make progress in relation to the Welsh language. The number of staff with a minimum of level 4 Welsh language conversational skills had increased as had the number of staff filling front facing roles that had the necessary Welsh language skills. There had been an increase in the number of presentations given through the medium of Welsh at schools and also an increase in the number of home fire safety checks delivered in Welsh.

- 8.3 Cllr L W Davies thanked officers for the positive report and that it was pleasing to note the continuous progress being made.
- 8.4 **RESOLVED to note the progress made in relation the Welsh Language Scheme and approve 2013-14 monitoring report prior to formal submission to the Welsh Language Commissioner.**
- 9 COMBINED IMPROVEMENT AND RISK REDUCTION PLAN 2015-16 ONWARDS PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION PROPOSAL
- 9.1 ACFO Ruth Simmons presented the report which informed members about the proposed public engagement consultation strategy in support of the development of the combined Improvement and Risk Reduction Plan 2015-16 onwards.
- 9.2 The consultation strategy sets out how the Authority's members can obtain the views of the public on their draft objectives prior to choosing the way forward for the future of fire and rescue services in North Wales. The consultation strategy has been informed by Participation Cymru National Principles of Public Engagement in Wales 2011 as endorsed by the First Minister. Key messages representing the main ideas to be expressed to audiences will be consistently given out and a variety of methods will be used to communicate with the public including social media, at community events and also internally via staff magazine and weekly briefs.
- 9.3 **RESOLVED to note the various aspects of the consultation strategy and endorse the key messages set out in the report.**
- 10 FITNESS STANDARDS
- 10.1 ACFO Simmons gave Members a presentation to raise awareness of the issues surrounding health, wellbeing and the levels of fitness required for operational firefighting. It was noted that fitness issues are associated with the current pension dispute between the Fire Brigades Union and the Government, however, it was emphasised that the information contained in the presentation was purely to raise awareness and not related to the dispute.
- 10.2 It was noted that a firefighter must be healthy and fit to undertake the role as it involves a variety of tasks that can be both physically and mentally arduous and often unpredictable in nature and duration. From an employer or organisational perspective, the Service needs to be confident it can provide an operational response service sufficient to bring an incident to a safe conclusion.
- 10.3 ACFO Simmons explained the various tests conducted and that the fitness aspect is an important part of the selection process and personnel are required to undertake firefighter selection tests. Members were informed about developments in fitness standards at a national level and that Wales is unique as it has a single fitness standard which allows the three FRSs in Wales to discharge the duty of care element to operational personnel, providing individuals with assessments monitoring and support according to their individual need rather than it being determined based on which Service employed them.

- 10.4 Cllr L W Davies asked about the mental health support available especially for those involved in a difficult incident. ACFO Simmons confirmed that the Service has a critical incident debrief system in place and that personnel are able to refer themselves for counselling via occupational health. The issue is also discussed with those attending recruitment events to ensure they understand that aspects of the job can prove to be difficult psychologically as well as physically.
- 10.5 It was noted that in addition to the physical tests, operational personnel must have medical checks which increase in regularity depending on age. The Service employs a fitness adviser available to all staff but who predominantly works with operational firefighters who need to improve their fitness.
- 10.6 The Chair thanked ACFO Simmons for the presentation and it was **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**
- 11 SAFER COMMUNITIES BOARD UPDATE
- 11.1 The Deputy Clerk gave members an update about the work of the regional Safer Communities Board that has been established. A single overarching plan for the region has been agreed and the community safety partnerships (CSP) are voluntarily aligning their plans with the regional plan. Different areas have different needs therefore it was considered important that each CSP was able to maintain flexibility in setting their own policies and have their own planning targets. A conflict resolution policy has been agreed should there be any issues.
- 11.2 **RESOLVED to note the information.**
- 12 FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES IN WALES PROJECT 2013
- 12.1 The CFO reminded Members that they had asked that the Chair and CFO to contact the Minister to express concern about the project report.
- 12.2 As agreed at all three FRA meetings in June, the Chairs of each Authority had sent letters to the Minister expressing dissatisfaction with the report. Thereafter, the Minister had invited the three Chairs to meet with her on 17 July 2014. The Chairs had outlined their concerns about the recommendations contained in the project report and had unanimously agreed not to provide representation on the programme board but had agreed that the CFOs could be contacted about the recommendations in the report.
- 12.3 The Minister had confirmed that the three FRAs will remain as separate entities but had concerns that the FRAs' funding was not transparent. The Treasurer confirmed that the funding method is laid down in the Combination Order and that NWFRAs operate its funding according to that Order.

12.4 The CFO gave a further update that since the meeting on 17 July the government's white paper on reforming local government had been published. It contains three consultation questions about FRAs which seem to be similar to recommendations 10-12 of the project report.

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

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.

13 BUSINESS CONTINUITY MANAGEMENT

13.1 The CFO updated Members about the latest developments with regard to industrial action by the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) over pension reform.

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