

**NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

These are the minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2006 at the Conwy Business Centre, Llandudno Junction. Meeting commenced at 10.45 am.

**Present:**

Councillor

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

S C Jones  
W E Jones  
J Vaughan  
G C Evans  
S Frobisher  
J A Smith  
D Barratt  
D Clayton  
E F Evans  
R G Hampson  
J Ovens  
M Griffith  
E Morgan Jones  
W T Owen  
G O Williams  
N S Colbourne  
G M Craddock  
M Williams  
W J Chorlton  
J A Roberts  
W T Roberts

Representing

Gwynedd Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council

Conwy County Borough Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Conwy County Borough Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Gwynedd Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council  
Ynys Môn County Council  
Ynys Môn County 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); C Hanks (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Support); P S Claydon (Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery); D Docx (Assistant Chief Officer, Finance and Procurement); W A Murphy (Senior Operations Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); S Forrest (Treasurer's Department, Conwy County Borough Council) and Rh Evans (Member Liaison Officer).

## **PART I**

### **1) Apologies**

#### Councillor

P C Evans JP  
D Jones MBE  
P M Shone

#### Representing

Conwy County Borough Council  
Denbighshire County Council  
Wrexham County Borough Council

### **2) Notice of Urgent Matters**

The Chairman advised that no items had been submitted to the Clerk for consideration.

### **3) Chairman's Announcements**

The Chairman apologised to the Authority for the change of venue for the meeting. He advised that a more central location was needed following the decision to host a reception to commemorate the Authority's tenth anniversary immediately following the meeting. He then:

- i. extended a warm welcome to Ms Dawn Docx, the Service's recently appointed Assistant Chief Officer (Finance and Procurement), to the meeting. Ms Docx was commencing her employment with the Service on the day of the meeting;
- ii. welcomed Councillors S C Jones and Ron Hampson back to the Authority meetings following periods of ill-health. Both members thanked everyone for their good wishes;
- iii. congratulations were extended to Councillor D Barratt on being elected the Chairman of Flintshire County Council for 2006/07 and to Councillor S Frobisher on being elected Mayor of Prestatyn for 2006/07. The Chairman also extended his congratulations to Councillor Frobisher's husband on being awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List;
- iv. Members were reminded of the need to submit VAT receipts with all mileage claims;
- v. Members were informed that the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services (NJC) had agreed a pay rise of 2.7% for firefighters with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> July 2006. Negotiations would commence shortly on the arrangements for the 2007 salary increases.

### **4) Minutes**

The following minutes were submitted:

- i. Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2006

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

The following minutes were submitted for information purposes:

- ii. Executive Panel meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2006
- iii. Appointments Panel meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2006

## **5) Matters Arising**

No matters arose from the minutes submitted.

## **6) Chairman's Report**

The Chairman introduced his report (distributed at the meeting) which provided members with a brief update on the meetings and events attended by him, in his capacity as Chairman, since the Fire and Rescue Authority's last meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2006. He proceeded to detail the events and activities listed in his report and answered members' questions on various aspects of the information provided. Particular reference was made to the recently established Young Firefighters Association (YFA) Branch at Llanfairfechan, which was now meeting on a fortnightly basis, and the North Wales YFA Achievement Weekend held at Bangor University on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> June 2006. The Chairman thanked the Authority for its support in funding the latter event, which had been hailed a huge success by all involved and by those that had attended as spectators. Councillor S Frobisher joined the Chairman in thanking everyone who had played their part in ensuring the event's success. Congratulations were extended to the Holyhead YFA Branch on being judged the overall achievers for 2006. The Chairman expressed his hopes that sufficient funding would be secured to enable this to become an annual event.

Members were informed by the Chairman that the Ministerial Launch, at Dover, of the Marine Incidents Response Group (MIRG), of which North Wales Fire and Rescue Service was a member, had been an excellent event. Further meetings of the Wales Fire and Rescue Service Advisory Committee (WF&RSAC) and the Fire and Rescue Service Liaison Group (FRSLG) were due to be held in the near future, as was a meeting of the trustees of Atal Tân Cymru.

The Vice-Chairman extended his congratulations to all members of staff who had been involved in any way with the organisation of the "Walesfire 2006" Conference. In his view the Conference had been an excellent event. It was:

**Resolved: - to note the information provided.**

## 7) Integrated Risk Management Plan – Third Year Action Plan

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) introduced his report (previously circulated) informing members of the Executive Panel's recommendations following the conclusion of the consultation on "Maintaining Momentum", the Authority's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP) third year action plan. Members were informed that, following the Authority's decision at its meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> March 2006 to defer a decision on adopting the Plan until the current meeting, the Executive Panel had met on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2006 to give further consideration to issues that had arisen from the consultation and to information received from the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) on the "Service Standards to Fires in the Home in Wales".

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Claydon proceeded to inform the Authority that paragraphs 6 to 8 of the report detailed the Panel's recommendations in relation to the Action Plan, whilst paragraph 7 contained the amended resolutions pertaining to the Dual Role Appliances, Emergency Tenders and Aerial Appliances. Paragraph 10 of the report detailed the additional information requested by the Executive Panel on the financial implications and preparatory work required in the near future in the lead up to the commissioning of a new aerial appliance. In reply to a question from the Chairman on whether, from an operational point of view, the information on which the proposal relating to the aerial appliances had been formed was likely to change within the next twelve months, officers advised that they did not envisage the situation to change. On receipt of this information Councillor W J Chorlton proposed that the final clause of the draft amendment relating to aerial appliances be deleted. This proposal was seconded and supported. It was:

***Resolved: - to adopt "Maintaining Momentum" as the Authority's Third Year Action Plan pending the inclusion of the following amendments to the first point of the action plan:***

- i. the section on Dual Role Appliances be amended to state – "This will see the introduction of six specifically designed dual role appliances being introduced into the Service with a further four appliances being modified to become dual role appliances. These appliances to be strategically located across North Wales to provide a 30 minute attendance standard. In addition, enquiries will be made on the availability of financial resources that would, in the long term, enable the Authority, based on risk, to extend the provision of dual role appliances to other stations across North Wales".***
- ii. the section on Emergency Tenders be amended to state – " It is proposed to upgrade all hydraulic rescue equipment carried on front line fire engines. This upgrade to be undertaken on a risk assessed basis and followed by the staged removal of two Emergency Tenders (ETs). On the completion of this phase the remaining two ETs to be upgraded to become Special Rescue Units (SRUs)."***

- iii. *the section on aerial appliances be amended to state – “We will adopt a 20 minute attendance standard for aerial appliances and, as a result, the current provision of four appliances will be retained.”*

#### 8) Risk Reduction Plan 2007/08

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) introduced his report (previously circulated) which presented members with the Authority’s draft Risk Reduction Plan (RRP) 2007/08. He advised the Authority that the Executive Panel, at its meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> May 2006, had made a number of amendments to the draft plan, all of which had been incorporated into the Plan prior to its submission to the Authority at the current meeting. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Claydon then detailed the community and corporate risks before advising members that, in line with the RRP Guidance, a copy of the draft Plan had been submitted to the WAG’s Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration as part of the informal discussion process. Furthermore, the Chief Fire Officer and Chairman were due to meet with the Minister to discuss the Authority’s proposals on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2006. Any amendments that the Authority resolved to make to the draft Plan would be reported verbally to the Minister at that meeting. Members:

**Resolved:** - *to note the contents of the report and approve the draft Risk Reduction Plan, as drafted, for public consultation.*

#### 9) Presentation by the Corporate Communications Department

The Chairman welcomed Mr Gareth Watson, the Service’s Corporate Communications Manager, to the meeting to give members a presentation on the recently established Corporate Communications Department. Mr Watson briefed members on the background that led to the establishment of the Department and outlined its role, and the roles of the individuals who work within it. He proceeded to explain that the Department’s remit encompassed all aspects of the Service’s corporate communications function, ranging from internal and external communications to Welsh Language issues. These functions could be broadly divided into four main categories:

**External communications** – this area included Public Relations, Public Affairs, Website, leaflets, posters and publications such as the “Informative”.

**Internal communications** – a daily news briefing service for all staff, a staff newsletter and other internal information bulletins and reports.

**Translation** – the provision of a corporate translation service for all Service and Authority documents and leaflets. The Service’s translator also advised officers on bilingual issues, monitored the use of bilingualism and gave advice on issues relating to the Service’s Welsh Language Scheme.

**Media Relations** – the production and distribution of regular press releases to local press and media outlets and the coordination of requests for television and radio interviews.

Mr Watson listed the Department's achievements to date, these included the launch of a new website, the development and implementation of the new corporate branding and identity, enhanced links with local, national and regional media and, as part of the North Wales Emergency Planning Media Working Group, strengthening partnership working links with other emergency services and local authorities in North Wales.

In concluding his presentation Mr Watson informed the Authority of the Department's future plans which included delivering communications awareness training to staff, the production of a Corporate Communications Strategy aimed at enabling the Service to further improve its communications functions and the development of an Intranet system. In answering members' questions, Mr Watson confirmed his team were currently looking at developing protocols for dealing with e-mails and for an official Service wide telephone greeting. He also advised the Authority that a joint recruitment campaign would form part of the plans for greater collaboration with the other Welsh fire and rescue authorities and the WAG. He apologised that his presentation was not in bilingual format and agreed that more should, and would, be done to encourage bilingualism.

The Chairman thanked Mr Watson for attending and answering members' questions.

## **9) Statement of Accounts 2005/06**

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) and the draft Statement of Accounts for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006. He apologised that the Welsh version of the draft accounts had not been available until the morning of the meeting, but explained that due to the time constraints involved in finalising the accounts this situation was unavoidable. The Treasurer proceeded to explain that the draft Statement of Accounts for 2005/06 was presented for members' approval in accordance with the provision of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2005. Copies of the draft accounts had been submitted to the Wales Audit Office (WAO) who would, in due course, examine them and issue a report. Members' attention was drawn to an error that appeared in the third paragraph of the fourth page of the English version of the draft Statement of Accounts: the figure quoted in the third sentence should read £35,000 not £35,00. In relation to the higher than anticipated underspend in the 2005/06 budget the Treasurer advised members that, as per paragraph 4 of the draft Accounts, steps had already been taken to utilise the underspend. As additional assurances were now required for the Statement of Internal Control, a new requirement for the 2005/06 Statement of Accounts, it had transpired that the current internal audit services provided by Conwy County Borough Council did not have the capacity to absorb the extra workload. Therefore it was prudent for the Authority to allocate part of the underspend to fund the additional work which would, probably, need to be outsourced to external consultants. He suggested that the last sentence of the final paragraph in section 4 be

amended to read "To ensure appropriate audit coverage a provision, from the balance of the underspend of £44,984 has been set up to fund additional audit work." Further consideration would be given on how to deal with the increased workload as part of the 2007/08 budget setting process. The Chief Fire Officer had recently met with the external auditor to discuss, amongst other issues, the Statement of Internal Control.

In reply to a question from the Vice-Chairman the Treasurer advised members that discussions were continuing on the new Firefighters' Pension Scheme. He also confirmed that he was not aware of a request for any additional contributions to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS). Members:

***Resolved: - pending the inclusion of the above presentational amendments to approve the Statement of Accounts for the financial year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006***

#### **10) Summary of Internal Audit Activity for 2005/06 and the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2006/07**

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) summarising the Internal Audit work for 2005/06 and the draft Internal Audit Plan for 2006/07. Before detailing the contents of his report the Treasurer informed members that the Wales Audit Office (WAO) had approached officers requesting to give members a presentation on the Authority's Audit Strategy 2005/06. As this request had not been received until the agenda and business arrangements for the current meeting had been finalised, the WAO had been advised that the Authority could not accommodate the request for the current meeting. The Treasurer advised that it would not be appropriate for the Authority to delay receiving the report until its next meeting in October, nor was it necessary to call an extraordinary meeting to receive and approve the Strategy. He was of the view that it would be appropriate for the Authority to delegate its powers in relation to this matter to the Executive Panel. It was:

***Resolved: -***

- i. to note the summary of Internal Audit work for 2005/06 and approve the Draft Internal Audit Plan for 2006/07; and***
- ii. to delegate its powers in relation to receiving and approving the Audit Strategy for 2005/06 to the Executive Panel.***

#### **11) Treasury Management**

The Treasurer introduced his annual treasury management report (previously circulated). He explained that the report, a requirement under the Authority's reporting procedures, covered the treasury management activities for 2005/06. Members were informed that, as part of the budget setting process and in order to comply with the requirements of the Prudential Code, the Authority had to set

a number of prudential indicators and report on the actual indicators after the year end.

Councillor J Vaughan enquired whether the fact that the Authority's budget had shown an underspend in excess of £500k equated to good treasury management. The Treasurer assured members that the total underspend was the consequence of a combination of factors which included good treasury management, favourable income and monetary market activity and lower than anticipated levels of operational activity. The Treasurer also reminded members that due to the nature of the service provided an element of caution had to be built-in to the Authority's budget setting process, as the overall budget outturn was largely dependent on the number of operational incidents attended. Members were reminded by the Chief Fire Officer that the anticipated levels of operational activities were extremely difficult to predict and adverse weather conditions resulting in a spate of grass fires or flooding could have a dramatic effect on the overall outturn figure. The reduction in the amount of operational activity also indicated that the Authority's proactive approach to fire safety work was paying dividends. Although the outturn figure was lower than originally anticipated members were informed by the Chief Fire Officer that the Authority had encountered a number of unexpected expenditure costs, such as Firefighters Pension Scheme contributions and the cost of the rank to role assimilation. Councillor W J Chorlton advised the Authority that, in his opinion, if it continued to underspend its budget by large amounts, the constituent authorities would be questioning the level of contributions requested from them into the Combined Fire Service Fund. It was:

**Resolved: - to**

- i. approve the actual 2005/06 Prudential Indicators; and*
- ii. note the report on the Treasury Management activities for 2005/06.*

**13) Bad Debt Write Off**

The Treasurer introduced his report (previously circulated) seeking, in accordance with the Authority's Financial Regulations, members' approval for the writing off of a bad debt. He explained that all the background information relating to the debt was contained in the report and that it was extremely rare for the Authority to be asked to write off a debt.

Councillor J A Smith informed officers that the site in question had recently been sold for development purposes and enquired whether the debt could therefore be recovered from the proceeds of the sale. The Treasurer advised that this would be dependent on a number of factors, including who owned the site when it was sold and whether or not the debtor was registered as a limited company. If the latter was applicable and the company had already been dissolved, no recovery action could be instigated against any individuals involved with that company. Councillor J A Smith proposed that further enquiries



be made regarding the receipts from the sale of the site before the Authority resolved to approve the writing off of the debt. This proposal was seconded by Councillor W J Chorlton. Members were cautioned by the Chief Fire Officer that the Authority may reach a point where the cost of pursuing the non-payment of the debt would exceed the amount of the debt. It was:

**Resolved:** -

- i. that further enquires be made to ascertain whether the debt could be recovered from the proceeds of the sale of the site prior to the Authority approving the writing off of the debt as irrecoverable; and*
- ii. that a report be presented to the Authority's meeting in October 2006 detailing the position.*

#### **14) Complaints and Letters of Appreciation**

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) introduced his annual report (previously circulated) informing and updating members on the number of complaints and letters of appreciation received from the public. He explained that although the total number of complaints received, investigated and resolved in accordance with the Authority's policies and procedures was higher than the previous year, the fact that the Service now had the capacity to receive complaints on a 24 hour, 7 day a week basis had probably contributed to the increased number of complaints received. It was therefore encouraging to report that only two more complaints had been substantiated than in the previous year. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Hanks proceeded to detail a number of the complaints summarised in his report. In concluding he stated that it was pleasing to report that the number of expressions of appreciation received was nearly double that of the previous year, and that they far outweighed the number of complaints received. Members:

**Resolved:** - *to note the number of complaints and expressions of appreciation received.*

#### **15) Format for Committee Reports**

The Chief Fire Officer introduced his report (previously circulated) which informed members of the new presentational format for reports submitted to the Fire and Rescue Authority and its committees. He explained that, for some time, he had been concerned about the lack of consistency and standardisation of committee reports. Consequently a review had been undertaken of the presentational format for committee reports. The background to the review, its remit, and the conclusions drawn were detailed in the report presented to members. The Chief Fire Officer proceeded to explain that all reports submitted to the current meeting had been published in the new format.

Members welcomed the new format and expressed the opinion that the increased font size and colour coding method would assist them in their work. Councillor D Barratt raised his concern that the use of pink paper for information reports may cause confusion for some members, as his home authority used pink paper for confidential reports. The Chief Fire Officer referred him to the report and advised that careful consideration had been given to the colours chosen for different types of reports. It had become evident during the review that there was no standard policy across the constituent authorities on the use of coloured paper, therefore the Authority had assumed its own colour coding procedure. It was:

***Resolved: - to note the information provided on the future format for the presentation of committee reports.***

#### **16) "Informative"**

The Chief Fire Officer presented the Authority with the current issue of the 'Informative' magazine. He advised members that this publication was one of the improvements to which the Corporate Communications Manager's had alluded in his presentation earlier in the meeting. Councillor J A Smith thanked officers for the publication and for all the work the Service undertook with young people. Members:

***Resolved: - to accept the publication.***

#### **17) Urgent Matters**

No items had been submitted for consideration.

#### **18) Dates of Authority Meetings 2006/07**

Members were advised that the dates for meetings of the full Authority during 2006/07 had been published on the business agenda. Due to the requirements of the Risk Reduction Planning (RRP) process the next meeting of the full Authority had been re-scheduled for Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2006 and would be held at the Guildhall, Wrexham. The Chairman undertook to circulate the venues for the other meetings along with the date for the next Executive Panel meeting to members as soon as the arrangements had been finalised.

### **PART II**

No business.

The business meeting concluded at 11.50am.

**The above minutes, pending any inclusions shown, are approved as a true and correct record of proceedings.**

**Signed:** T Roberts

**Dated:** 23 October, 2006

**Note:**

Prior to commencing the item on "Marking the Authority's Tenth Anniversary" the Chairman presented a gift to Mr Peter Slee to mark his retirement from his post as the Service's Assistant Chief Officer (Corporate Services). The Chairman informed Mr Slee that the gift was presented to him as a token of the Authority's gratitude and appreciation to him for his 36 years of loyal service to the fire service. He paid tribute to his professionalism and thanked him for being so approachable and always willing to assist staff and members alike. He wished him well in his retirement. Mr Slee thanked the Authority for the gift and members and officers for their good wishes.

**19) Marking the Authority's Tenth Anniversary**

The Chairman welcomed current and past members and officers to the Conwy Business Centre for this special item of business which had been arranged to mark the tenth anniversary of the Authority's inception.

He informed all present that, over the past decade, the Authority had faced a number of challenges. The most fundamental change had been in the way the Service was governed and in particular the devolvement of responsibility for fire and rescue authorities in Wales to the National Assembly for Wales.

To mark the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary the Authority had commissioned the publication of a commemorative booklet. The booklet gave a brief history of the development of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority and summarised some its achievements over the past decade. Prior to the Chairman inviting everyone to partake in lunch all present were encouraged to take the opportunity to view the Service's latest tool for delivering safety education, the "Multi Purpose Educational Vehicle". A copy of the commemorative booklet was distributed to all present.