

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

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 11 May 2015 at Fire and Rescue Headquarters, St Asaph. Meeting commenced at 10.00am.

PRESENT

Cllr P R Lewis (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 R J Dutton	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr H McGuill	Flintshire County Council
Cllr W R Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr W T Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr R E Parry	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council

ALSO PRESENT:

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

1 APOLOGIES

Cllr M LI Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr R O Jones	Anglesey County Council
Cllr G Lowe	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr P W Owen	Denbighshire County Council

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

2.1 None

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 None

4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 FEBRUARY 2015

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 IMPROVEMENT PLAN WORKING GROUP UPDATE

6.1 The DCFO presented the report which gave members an update on the work of the Improvement Planning Working Group.

6.2 The working group has met on three occasions, during March and April 2015, to start considering and developing the Authority's improvement objectives for 2016-17. At the meetings, Members had received detailed presentations on the risk review that had been undertaken and on an in-depth analysis of all incidents between 2009 and 2014. The challenges of delivering fire cover using the retained duty system had been discussed as had community safety and ways of enhancing the role of a firefighter. The information provided had prompted extensive discussions as to ways of making best use of resources to meet risk, particularly now that the Authority is operating on a reduced budget.

6.3 Cllr McGuill commented that the working group had considered and examined the information in-depth and that it was reassuring to know that any recommendations and decisions that may follow will not have been made without serious consideration of all possible implications. Cllr McGuill took the opportunity of reassuring the auditor present at the meeting that there was documentation that could be shared with her to demonstrate the level of information that had been considered. These comments were reiterated by other members.

6.4 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) note the progress of the Improvement Planning Working Group;**
- (ii) endorse the concept of flexibly providing firefighters to match levels of risk;**
- (iii) encourage the Fire and Rescue Authority to explore wider aspects of community safety.**

At this point, the Chair changed the order of the agenda and asked for the Fleet presentation to be given.

7 FLEET PRESENTATION

7.1 Dave Bond, the Service's Fleet Manager, delivered a presentation explaining all main aspects of the work undertaken in the Fleet department.

7.2 It was noted that the department's main functions include design and specification of new appliances, asset management of all Service vehicles and equipment together with efficient and cost effective maintenance undertaken internally where possible, and also fuel management. Fleet has played a part in assisting NWFRS to achieve its Platinum Welsh Corporate Health award due to the environmental measures which have been introduced over the years to enable the Service to have a healthier and more environmental-friendly approach to its maintenance of vehicles.

- 7.3 The three Welsh FRS' Fleet Managers seek to work together where possible under the NIC. The department currently has two apprentices on a four year placement, the apprenticeship scheme is considered essential in order to develop new staff for the years ahead.
- 7.4 In response to a member's question about the number of vehicles in the Service, it was confirmed that all vehicles are fitted with a tracker and the information is used to determine the efficient use and size of the fleet required.
- 7.5 The CFO commented that the Fleet department has been extremely innovative in its approach over the years which has been of benefit to the Service and this has been due to Mr Bond's abilities as an engineer.
- 7.6 The Chair closed the discussion by thanking Mr Bond for an enjoyable presentation and thanking him and the Fleet staff for their work.

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

8 DELIVERING WITH LESS – WORKFORCE RECONFIGURATION

- 8.1 The DCFO introduced the draft report on 'Delivering with Less – workforce reconfiguration' as prepared by the Wales Audit Office and asked Lisa Williams from the WAO to take members through the report.
- 8.2 Ms Williams explained the background to the report and that a similar piece of work had been undertaken for local authorities looking at how organisations coped with reduced budgets and the impact on delivery of statutory services. In terms of the fire and rescue authorities, WAO and FRS officers had decided that the thematic study should focus on employees as that was the Authority's biggest budget expenditure.
- 8.3 The DCFO reminded members that one of the largest projects involving employees had been the rostering project which involved changing how firefighters were rostered for duty. This had entailed a project team researching shift systems within other FRSs in the UK, co-operation with the Fire Brigades Union representatives and holding regular meetings with the firefighters on stations. Officers considered this to have been a successful piece of work but had concerns that other change management projects in future may not have the same level of resource to enable such detailed work to be undertaken.
- 8.4 Ms Williams explained that the WAO's report presented, overall, a positive view of the project and that the objective of reconfiguring the workforce had been achieved as desired. However, the WAO's report highlighted some minor weaknesses due to limitations in the project documentation available, but recognised that practical and appropriate decisions had been made throughout the project.

- 8.5 In answer to a member's question, Ms Williams confirmed that the lack of documentation had not caused the WAO to have any particular concern about decisions taken or that any decisions had been taken inappropriately. However, it was considered that the lack of documentation impedes officers being able to reflect on the work done and lessons learned for the future. Ms Williams recognised that the WAO's recommendations/proposals for improvement needed to add value to the Service's work but not to add cost.
- 8.6 Members were concerned about the publication of the report as its content did not reflect Ms Williams' comments above and therefore the report could be perceived in the wrong context by the public.
- 8.7 Cllr McGuill again stressed that as a member of the Authority she was confident that the documentation and analysis she had seen had been thorough enough for her to feel comfortable and have no issues with the work of the FRA.
- 8.8 Having listened to the discussion, the Chair concluded the discussion and proposed that Members agree to the following point being raised with the Auditor General for Wales via Ms Williams:
- considering the current financial situation would it not be more appropriate for the organisation to be putting its valuable resource to best use and that the WAO accept this approach and recognise that when considering their proposals for improvement that instead of making 'desirable' proposals that they should be content with what they deem 'acceptable' in the current financial circumstances.
- 8.9 **RESOLVED to agree that the point above be raised with the Auditor General for Wales and note that the Authority is duty bound to take note of the report and the proposals for improvement.**

## 9 STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 The Corporate Planning Manager presented the report which sought members' approval for new arrangements for overseeing and managing strategic risks to the Authority; and to present a definition of strategic risk for adoption by the Authority.
- 9.2 Members have previously been informed of plans to introduce a new strategic risk management policy and strategic risk register in response to an internal audit review undertaken of the Authority's corporate governance arrangements. The definition of a strategic risk being proposed for adoption by the Authority is: "an event that, should it occur, would impact on the achievement of the Authority's planned outcomes and/or the delivery of its core functions".
- 9.3 Members were informed about the proposed arrangements for maintaining appropriate levels of overview and management of the Authority's strategic risks which would include officers ensuring that strategic risks identified are managed in accordance with defined risk priority levels and considered as part of corporate decision-making and planning.

- 9.4 Due to the nature of a strategic risk register, it would not be appropriate or practical to present its entire contents at open meetings of the Authority, therefore members are asked to agree that the Executive Panel receives a summary report on strategic risk at least once a year and that the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority view the full detail of the register with officers on a regular basis. Additional assurance would be provided through internal audit reports on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's internal control environment, including risk management and corporate governance arrangements.
- 9.5 Members discussed the report and requested that a monitoring report be submitted to the Executive Panel twice a year, at the May and October Executive Panel meetings. The Treasurer confirmed that this would enhance the corporate governance and the assurance for members on how the organisation is considering the risks.
- 9.6 **RESOLVED to recommend to the Authority the approval of the:**  
**(i) suggested definition of strategic risk as noted in paragraph 9.2, and**  
**(ii) proposed arrangements for the overview and management of strategic risks facing the Authority subject to a report being presented to the Executive Panel at the May and October meetings.**
- 10 COUNTRYSIDE AND GRASS FIRES
- 10.1 ACFO Fairhead presented the report which informed members of recent activity in relation to countryside and grass fires in North Wales.
- 10.2 Due to the media coverage and political attention of the numerous deliberately ignited fires in the countryside in South Wales, ACFO Fairhead reassured members that the number of countryside and grass fires in North Wales this spring had been broadly comparable with previous years.
- 10.3 It was noted that there has been a reduction in these types of fires in the last five years and that North Wales FRS has done a lot of work with landowners informing them of their responsibilities when lighting fires to clear vegetation from land; this has included promoting the telephone number for people to call when they are intending to carry out controlled burning which helps to avoid unnecessary attendances to fires in response to reports made in good faith by people concerned about the fire. In response to a member's question about the money spent on prevention work in this area, ACFO Fairhead explained that it was difficult to quantify how many fires had been prevented due to the promoting and informing work that was undertaken. Members felt that the reduced number of calls and incidents over the years demonstrated the value of spending money on prevention work.
- 10.4 North Wales FRS and the Arson Reduction Team work closely with the North Wales Police with the aim of continuing to drive down the incidence of countryside and grass fires in North Wales.
- 10.5 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**

11 FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY BUDGET 2015-16 - SUPPORTING PROJECTS – UPDATE

- 11.1 ACFO Fairhead informed Members of the initial effects of the decisions made at the extraordinary meeting of the Fire and Rescue Authority on 2 December 2014 regarding stopping providing specialist rope rescue and large animal rescue services, and revising arrangements for calls originating from automatic fire alarms (AFAs).
- 11.2 Prior to ceasing the rope rescue and large animal rescue services on 1 April 2015, officers had held a series of meetings with organisations which would be affected such as mountain rescue teams and information had been shared with the public via various events and social media in order to raise awareness of the changes. It was noted that since 1 April 2015 and up to the date of the meeting, no calls had been received in relation to rope rescue nor large animal rescue.
- 11.3 In terms of stopping attending false alarms from AFAs, a project plan had been established focussing on communicating the new policy, amending internal policies and procedures and the arrangements for monitoring and reviewing was completed. Since 1st April and up to the date of the meeting, 78 AFA calls had been received, 73 of those calls had not resulted in an attendance and 5 incidents had been attended with a reduced attendance. The report quoted a saving of £6,357 due to the non-attendance at the 73 incidents, however, ACFO Fairhead confirmed at the meeting that this was not a direct cash saving.
- 11.4 Members felt that the report and figures provided were encouraging and **RESOLVED to note the impact of the introduction of the new policies and request that a further update be provided at the October Executive Panel meeting.**

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.

12 INDUSTRIAL ACTION

- 12.1 The CFO advised members that there had been no further periods of industrial action nor any escalation or change and the dispute is still officially in place at a national level and the action short of strike (ASOS) is still in place. The new pension regulations came into force on 1 April and the FRA is now working under those regulations. However, as previously reported Welsh Government had taken a different approach to the issues in dispute and following consultation had adopted a scheme which had also been implemented as of 1 April 2015.
- 12.2 **RESOLVED to note the update.**