

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

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 26 October 2015 at Fire and Rescue Headquarters, St Asaph. Meeting commenced at 10am.

PRESENT

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

ALSO PRESENT:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); K Finch (Treasurer); C Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer); R Fairhead and R Simmons (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); G W Griffiths (Training and Development Manager); G Brandrick (Professional and Service Standards Manager); K Roberts (Senior Operations Manager); S Millington (Senior Fire Safety Manager); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); S Barry, Wales Audit Office; A Davies (Member Liaison Officer).

1 APOLOGIES

Cllr B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
Cllr W T Owen	Gwynedd Council
Cllr A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council
D Docx	Deputy 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 20 JULY 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 BUDGET OPTIONS 2016-17

6.1 The CFO introduced the report which updated Members about the development of the Fire and Rescue Authority's draft revenue budget for 2016-17.

6.2 The financial pressures facing the public sector are well documented and it is therefore proposed that the Authority's second objective regarding the three year financial plan be amended from 'limiting the cost of funding the current level of service to £1 increase per head of population' to 'developing a three year financial strategy in which freezing the budget will be a central principle'.

6.3 It was noted that due to the UK Government's comprehensive spending review not being published until 25 November, it is anticipated that the Welsh Government will not be able to issue its draft budget until the early part of 2016. This has implications for the fire and rescue authorities' deadline (30 December) of informing constituent authorities of their proposed contributions to the FRA. In response to a member's question it was confirmed that a supplementary contribution request could be issued in-year however the Treasurer's advice was to avoid this if at all possible. As a consequence of these delays, the Authority will only be able to consider a progress report on the budget at its December meeting and therefore an extraordinary meeting will be required in January 2016.

6.4 A number of potential budget pressures for 2016-17 remain uncertain or unquantified. This includes the future of direct grants from WG, including the long standing annual grant of £400k currently provided for radio and communications (Airwave). However, it is estimated that the difference between the cost of a continuation budget and a frozen budget is £1.3million, but it was noted that this is only a provisional, and the minimum, figure at this stage.

6.5 Members discussed the use of the general reserve fund to underpin the budget, and the Treasurer advised that using this fund would pose a significant risk to the Authority in the longer term. It is generally advised that a reserve fund of 5% of the total budget should be maintained at all times, and this would equate to £1.5million of the Authority's budget. The Clerk commented that the reserves fund is a bridging position in order to allow time to plan further actions. Having discussed the issues, with officers answering members' questions, the Chair moved to the recommendations.

6.6 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) **note the cause of delays around setting a balanced budget for 2016-17;**
- (ii) **recommend to the Authority that an extraordinary Fire Authority meeting should be held on Monday 25 January 2016 to agree the budget;**

- (iii) **recommend to the Authority that the 2016-17 budget be constructed on the basis of the current level of service provision;**
- (iv) **recommend that the Authority considers underpinning the 2016-17 budget with funding taken from the general reserves, taking into account the substantial risks that it then creates for subsequent years.**

7 PERFORMANCE MONITORING

- 7.1 The report provided Members with information relating to North Wales Fire and Rescue Service activity and monitoring performance against the improvement objectives.
- 7.2 The Corporate Planning Manager led Members through the report and highlighted the following:
- 7.3 The majority of categories under improvement objective 1 of preventing deaths and injuries from accidental fires in dwellings were not as good as they had been at this point last year. However, when compared with previous years there were only small variations and therefore it could be considered that the Service's performance profile was 'settling down'. Members also acknowledged that by and large there was no major deterioration in performance in any of the categories despite the challenges facing the Service.
- 7.4 The Deputy Chair suggested examining whether there was any correlation between the absence of smoke alarms in dwelling fires and the amount of prevention activity completed by the Service.
- 7.5 Cllr McGuill expressed concern about the number of fire incidents in dwellings where the smoke alarm had not activated. It was confirmed that this was the case in 33 out of the 55 fires and the majority of these fires were contained to the room of origin; Cllr McGuill asked whether this was an indication that these fires were due to electrical devices and requested this information be provided at the next Executive Panel meeting in order for members to have a better understanding of the figures.
- 7.6 The total number of incidents attended had reduced by almost 25% demonstrating that the Authority's preventative work continues to be effective. All types of fires had seen a reduction apart from chimney fires where there had been a slight increase compared to the same period in 2014-15.
- 7.7 It was pleasing to note that despite an increase in the number of non-domestic premises across North Wales, there had been a reduction in the number of fires in this type of premises.
- 7.8 The Authority's new policy not to attend unconfirmed calls from automatic fire alarms at some non-domestic premises had had a positive impact on activity in the first six months since implementation showing a 76.3% reduction when compared to the same period in 2014-15. It was noted that the Minister was pleased with the results of this policy change.
- 7.9 **RESOLVED to note the performance monitoring report.**

8 FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY BUDGET 2015-16 SUPPORTING PROJECTS - UPDATE

- 8.1 ACFO Fairhead presented the report which informed Members of the effects of the Authority's decisions to stop providing specialist rope rescue and large animal rescue services, and the revised arrangements for calls originating from automatic fire alarms (AFAs).
- 8.2 Members were reminded that having received information on potential cost savings and the risk impacts of ceasing these non-statutory services and reduce attendance to calls from AFAs, the Authority had decided to implement these changes as of 1 April 2015 with a view to reviewing the decisions at the end of the 2015-16 financial year.
- 8.3 It was noted that since 1 April 2015 there have been no calls to attend any rope rescue incidents; of the 10 calls requesting assistance with large animal rescues, one attendance had been made. Of the 685 AFA calls received, 45 attendances had been made to AFA incidents. The cashable savings to the Authority, to date, was nearly £35k. In terms of non-cashable savings, wholetime crews on duty had not been mobilised to 264 incidents and were therefore able to use their time more effectively on activities such as community safety work or training; and, the Chair commented that, not attending AFA incidents meant that crews were more likely to be available to attend real incidents. Members were grateful to the officers for the advice and guidance provided in order for the Authority to make these decisions.
- 8.4 **RESOLVED to note the positive impact of the introduction of the new policies.**

9 ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT REPORT

- 9.1 Steve Barry attended the meeting to present the Wales Audit Office's Annual Improvement Report to Members. The Auditor General for Wales is required to report on how well public authorities are planning for improvement and delivering their services. It was noted that the report had been published on WAO's website.
- 9.2 Mr Barry 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 2015-16. Having listened to the discussion and debate at the meeting, Mr Barry was assured and satisfied that the Authority is planning appropriately. He also commented that the Authority should be commended for making savings of £2 million on staff costs whilst maintaining and improving its services.
- 9.3 Two minor proposals for improvement had been suggested which are to publish a medium term financial plan and maintain a full record of supporting work undertaken on projects.

9.4 Cllr Lewis felt that the report should be welcomed and that the Authority should congratulate itself on receiving such a positive report. It was noted that the medium term financial plan is work in progress and will be published in readiness for the 2016-17 financial year.

9.5 **RESOLVED to note the annual improvement report.**

10 RESOURCING STRATEGY

10.1 ACFO Simmons delivered a presentation informing members of the Service's operational resourcing strategy for 2015-16 and beyond.

10.2 The operational resourcing strategy is influenced by the strategic direction set out in the Authority's own public consultation entitled 'Your Services Your Choices' and the WG's new Fire and Rescue National Framework 2016 Onwards; both documents focus on maintaining excellent, affordable fire and rescue services in 2016-17 and beyond.

10.3 In taking forward the strategy for 2015-16 and beyond, the Authority will need to consider the optimum proportion of personnel on each of the duty systems to enable the Service to meet future challenges. This will involve resourcing to meet the risk and will feature flexibility, availability and cost.

10.4 ACFO Simmons explained the different types of contracts that were now used within the Service; in addition to wholetime duty and retained duty there are flexi contracts and the new apprenticeship scheme. Members were reminded of the difficulties around recruiting RDS firefighters but were informed that the recent wholetime duty system recruitment had attracted over 1,000 applicants.

10.5 Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and were pleased with the ongoing work.

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