

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** held on **Monday 15 July 2024** virtually via **Zoom**. Meeting commenced at **09.55hrs**.

Councillor

Dylan Rees (Chair)
Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
Marion Bateman
Tina Claydon
Adele Davies-Cooke
Sharon Doleman
Jeff Evans
Chrissy Gee
Alan Hughes
John Brynmor Hughes
Gareth R Jones
Marc Jones
Gwynfor Owen
Beverley Parry-Jones
Arwyn Herald Roberts
Austin Roberts
Rondo Roberts
Paul Rogers
Gareth Sandilands
Dale Selvester
Michelle Walker
Mark Young

Representing

Anglesey County Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Anglesey County Council
Flintshire County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Gwynedd Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Gwynedd Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Denbighshire County Council

Also present:

Dawn Docx	Chief Fire Officer (CFO)
Helen MacArthur	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Justin Evans	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Dafydd Edwards	Treasurer
Gareth Owens	Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Matt Powell	Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Tracey Williams	Head of Corporate Communications
George Jones	Atebol Translation Services
Lisa Allington	Members' Services

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Rob Triggs
Gareth A Roberts
Carol Beard

Representing

Gwynedd Council
Gwynedd Council
Conwy County Borough Council

ABSENT

Councillor

Bryan Apsley
Chris Hughes
John Ifan Jones

Representing

Wrexham County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Anglesey County Council

The above apologies were offered and accepted.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 No notice of urgent matters had been received.

4 MINUTES OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 15 APRIL 2024

4.1 The minutes of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) meeting held on 15 April 2024 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the FRA minutes from 15 April 2024 as a true and correct record of the meeting held.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 With reference to paragraph 7.5 in connection with the appointments to regional positions within the Fire Brigades Union (FBU), the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) confirmed that both Terry Ledden and Rebekah Uden had been officially appointed to Regional Chair and Regional Secretary of the FBU respectively. The Chair confirmed that he had written to them on behalf of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) to offer congratulations.

6 CHAIR'S REPORT

6.1 It was noted that a written paper had been provided to Members to inform them on the meetings and events attended by the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Authority in their official capacities between April and June 2024.

6.2 The Chair added a verbal update that, on 28 May 2024, Cabinet Secretary Julie James wrote to all Local Authority Leaders to confirm that she was looking into a review of Governance arrangements for Fire and Rescue Authorities across Wales. She invited Local Authority Leaders to present their views and in order to facilitate this, the WLGA held a virtual meeting on 28 June at which feedback could be given.

- 6.3 General consensus had been that too many Members were required to make up a Fire Authority and that this should be reduced from its current 28. It was also felt that co-opted appointments may be beneficial, but that these should be made by the Fire and Rescue Authorities rather than the Welsh Government.
- 6.4 Any new Governance arrangements would be trialled at South Wales initially and legislation for those changes would not take place during this term of the Senedd.

6.5 **RESOLVED to:**

i) Note the information provided within the paper.

7 EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW (ECR)

- 7.1 ACFO Evans presented the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) paper which provided Members with an update on the progress made by the ECR Task and Finish Group, established in response to the decision made by the Authority at its meeting on 18 December 2023. The purpose of this group was to research and develop a new permanent option for the provision of emergency cover across North Wales.
- 7.2 A Member expressed some concern around who the members of the working group had been and whether there had been enough representation from the rural areas of North of Wales in order to ensure equity. They also requested details on which areas would receive improved cover and which stations would be impacted by any changes made, and in what way.
- 7.3 It was confirmed by AM Jones that there had been representation on the working group from rural areas, including Watch Managers from Aberdyfi and Tywyn, Llanfairfechan and the rural team. Many of the members were also retained firefighters and there had therefore been a wide range of experience across North Wales, and across both whole-time and retained duty systems. The meetings had also been held in various locations across North Wales.
- 7.4 The CFO confirmed that the stations originally put forward in the original ECR Review would be most likely be those changed to day staffed stations. This was because the modelling showed that these were where the best response would be received. She further commented that a much broader understanding of the issue had arisen from these meetings and an understanding and desire to take action to resolve the issue.

7.5 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve that Officers continue to work with staff and representative bodies in social partnership to progress, develop and implement ECR Task and Finish Group research models two, and three, or variations of them, following consultation with staff;**
- ii) approve that the Service undertake the necessary arrangements to make suitable the stations identified for the introduction of a day staffing duty system; and**
- iii) appreciate the efforts and contribution made by the ECR Task and Finish Group Members to develop a new permanent option for the provision of emergency cover across North Wales.**

8 FLEET DECARBONISATION PLAN

- 8.1 ACFO Evans delivered the paper on the Fleet Decarbonisation Plan (the Plan) which aimed to set out the detailed measures and timescales to mitigate the carbon emissions arising from our vehicle fleet for the period up to 2030.
- 8.2 One Member expressed concern around the risks with regards to the cost of utilising Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) and asked from where it was being brought into the Country. ACFO Evans confirmed that he would establish this information and let Members know outside of the meeting.
- 8.3 Another Member queried the sustainability of the HVO and asked that checks on whether palm oil was used in its production be made. They also queried whether HVO would destabilise in periods of cold weather.
- 8.4 ACFO confirmed that HVO was safe to a temperature of -10 degrees, and that all appliances would be fully interchangeable with diesel in any case, and so this could be used as a back-up should cold weather create issues.
- 8.5 The Member felt that this should be used as a pilot scheme and not rolled out across the Service until it could be seen how the HVO market was going to develop.
- 8.6 It was asked whether planning applications had been made for storage of the HVO and ACFO Evans confirmed that they had. ACFO Evans also confirmed that testing of the fuel had already taken place within the Service with the training appliance. It was noted that with the use of alternative fuels, adaptations to the existing fleet was always the biggest issue.

8.7 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the Fleet Decarbonisation Plan.**

9 PROTOCOL ON MEMBER/EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

9.1 Matthew Powell, Deputy Monitoring Clerk, presented to Members the amended Protocol on Member/Employee Relations and confirmed that the purpose of the paper was to review the Protocol on Member/Employee Relations (the Protocol) to ensure that it remain up to date and pertinent.

9.2 A Member referred to the third paragraph of item 2.6 of the protocol, and stated that they felt that this paragraph had been ignored by some Members with regards to the Emergency Cover Review. They further felt that it was an issue that there was no mention of the relationship between officers and the Unions within the Protocol.

9.3 The Deputy Clerk confirmed that the amendments to the Protocol were not being made in order to change its scope, rather to encapsulate a wider category of worker.

9.4 The Clerk further added that it was inevitable that Members would wish to speak to local fire crews with regards to the ECR, and that the FBU had taken full advantage of their ability to contact Members during that consultation. The Protocol did not seek to restrict that, but merely to set standards of good practice.

9.5 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) agree that the revised Protocol be adopted as part of the Constitution.**

10 PERFORMANCE MONITORING: 2023/24 FINANCIAL YEAR

10.1 AM Jones presented the Performance Monitoring Report for the 2023/24 Financial Year, the purpose of which was to provide information about incident activity during the 2023/24 financial year, performance in relation to the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's (the Authority) improvement and well-being objectives, and other notable incident activity.

10.2 A Member asked that the thanks of the Authority be passed on to all members of staff for the excellent prevention work being carried out across the Service.

10.3 In connection with the increase in false alarms at the hospital, it was asked if there was a possibility that the Health Board were slipping with their investment in fire prevention systems, and therefore passing the risk and the financial burden to the Service. AM Jones responded that partnership work was being carried out between the Service and the Health Board, and that it was known that the Board had plans to invest in the infrastructure of their alarm systems in order to improve the situation.

10.4 **RESOLVED to:**

i) **note the content of the performance monitoring report.**

11 COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN 2024-2029 AND COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2024-2025

11.1 AM Jones presented to Members the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP) 2024-2029 and Community Risk Management Implementation Plan (CRMIP) 2024-2025. The purpose of this paper was twofold; to provide an overview of the feedback received from the public consultation on the CRMP 2024-2029, the CRMIP 2024-2025 and the associated Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA); and to seek approval of the final version of the aforementioned documents.

11.2 Concern was expressed that there were no predictions included within the report for flooding. AM Jones responded that flooding was difficult to predict and whilst there had been a decrease in wildfires this year, there had been an increase in flooding incidents due to the inclement weather. Work was being carried out by the planning team on how this could be better predicted in the future.

11.3 **RESOLVED to:**

i) **Note the content of the feedback report; and**

ii) **Approve the attached CRMP 2024-2029, CRMIP 2024-25 and associated EqIA for publication.**

12 DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

12.1 AM Jones presented to Members the Draft Annual Governance Statement, as required by The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014. It was confirmed that this draft had been submitted to Audit Wales prior to 31 May as required by the aforementioned legislation.

12.2 **RESOLVED to:**

i) **note the governance arrangements outlined within the draft 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement;**

ii) **note the forward work plan for 2024/25; and**

iii) **approve the draft 2023/24 Annual Government Statement.**

13 FIREFIGHTERS PENSION SCHEMES LOCAL PENSION BOARD – ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24 AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

13.1 ACFO MacArthur presented to Members the annual report of the Local Pension Board (the Board) which detailed the work of the Board during the 2023/24 financial year. It was noted that the annual report was attached at appendix 1.

13.2 Furthermore, approval was sought from Members to increase the membership of the Local Pension Board. These proposed changes were set out in the updated Terms of Reference attached at appendix 2.

13.3 The Chair thanked members of the Local Pension Board for their work in this important area.

13.4 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the Local Pension Board 2023/24 Annual Report; and**
- ii) approve the terms of reference for the Local Pension Board, noting the increase of the membership to 10 members.**

14 UPDATE ON PROCESSING THE AGE DISCRIMINATION REMEDY

14.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the paper on the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, the purpose of which was to provide Members with an update on the statutory changes to Firefighters' Pension Scheme following significant legal challenges, more commonly known as the McCloud and O'Brien (Matthews 2) pension remedy exercises.

14.2 A Member asked who bore the financial risk in relation to this complicated issue. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that ultimately the financial risk rested with the pension fund and that an estimate of the arrears for the second choice and the impact of the age discrimination has been built into the valuation of the Pension Scheme and would be reflected in the employee contributions. Top up funding was received by the Service from the Welsh Government annually in order to ensure that the cost remained neutral to the Service.

14.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) Note the statutory requirements to implement the changes to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme regulations; and**
- ii) Endorse the proposals set out within this report for the management of cases impacted by the tax laws.**

15 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24

- 15.1 ACFO HM delivered the paper on the Internal Audit Annual Report 2023/24. Members were advised that under the terms of the Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014 Part 3 5. (2), the Authority was required annually to conduct a review of the effectiveness of its system of Internal Control. Internal Audit were an integral part of that system and a significant contributor to the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement.
- 15.2 Furthermore, CIPFA's Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2017 require the Head of Internal Audit to provide the Authority with assurance on the whole system of internal control, including the adequacy of risk management and corporate governance arrangements.
- 15.3 The report analysed the work of the Internal Audit Service for 2023/24 and contained the assurance statement based on the work of Internal Audit during the year ended March 2024.
- 15.4 It was noted that this paper had already been scrutinised by the Audit Committee who had endorsed it for approval.
- 15.5 The Treasurer noted that the only recommendation within the report of any real note was cyber security; however, the Authority was taking steps forward to improve the Service's cyber defences.
- 15.6 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) approve the content of the Head of Audit and Procurement's Annual Report and the overall 'opinion' upon the adequacy and effectiveness of the Authority's framework of governance, risk management and control.**

16 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2023/24

- 16.1 The Treasurer explained that the purpose of this paper was to confirm the year-end outturn position for 2023/24 and to present the unaudited Statement of Accounts for 2023/24. Members were also asked to note the timetable for the audit of the statement of accounts.
- 16.2 It was noted that the report also provided confirmation on other financial matters relating to 2023/24, including the Authority's position for usable reserves, write-offs of bad debts and the full year prudential indicators.
- 16.3 Paragraph 11 of the report was brought to Members' attention, and it was noted that the Chair would sign the final version of the Declaration, after examination and on behalf of the Authority, which would then be submitted to a subsequent meeting for formal approval. Therefore, as

good practice, this paper confirmed the fiscal position of 31 March 2024 for reference.

- 16.4 The Treasurer further highlighted that the paper also confirmed the Authority's year-end reserves position, and the write-off of eighteen bad debts, totalling £1,492 in the year. Whilst the Welsh Government and Audit Wales had allowed tolerance from an extended period since Covid, the Authority's Finance officers had voluntarily endeavoured and managed to adhere to the regulations' original timetable for account closures. Thanks were given to Helen Howard, now retired Head of Finance and Procurement, for the conscientious work of both herself and her team.
- 16.5 It was noted that paragraph 4 on page 266 of the package demonstrated that actual spending for 2023/24 was £44.3m against a budget of £44.4m.
- 16.6 As paragraph 5 made clear, the £6.532m capital budget for 2023/24 included £3 million to purchase land for the proposed training centre, which was now expected to be completed during 2024/25. The rest of the capital programme was stretched and there was prioritisation to stay within budget. Members were asked to note that spending was at £2.2m by the end of the year, but it was requested that £3.9m be carried forward. The Audit Committee had received an update on this in their meeting of 17 June, and debt write-offs were under scrutiny by the Budget Working Group.
- 16.7 The final position was a 'marginal' underspend of £94k. The main revenue expenditure headings and the draft outturn situation were set out in the table under paragraph 14 on page 268 of the pack. Savings from vacancies had mitigated the higher-than-expected national wage settlement.
- 16.8 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the unaudited revenue and capital outturn position for the 2023/24 financial year, including the earmarked reserves set out in the report;**
 - ii) note the unaudited 31/03/2024 balance sheet position;**
 - iii) receive and note the draft Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 contained within Appendix A;**
 - iv) note the prudential indicators as at quarter four of 2023/24; and**
 - v) note the write offs approved by the Treasurer, in accordance with the financial regulations.**

17 APPOINTMENT OF THE PROPER OFFICER FOR S.36 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000

17.1 The Clerk explained that the purpose of this paper was to ask Members to appoint the Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk as the proper officer, known as the “qualified person”, to enable to apply the exemption under section 36 Freedom of Information Act 2000 (“FOIA”)

17.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) designate the Chief Fire Officer and the Clerk as the qualified persons for the purpose of applying the exemption in section 36 Freedom of Information Act 2000.**

18 URGENT MATTERS

18.1 There were no urgent matters to consider.

PART II

19 CULTURAL REVIEW

19.1 The CFO confirmed that, following an extensive procurement exercise, a company called Crest Consultancy had been retained to carry out the independent culture review into both North Wales and Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Services. Crest would be delivering a fully bilingual service.

19.2 Crest were a very experienced company in looking at the theme of culture and how other Fire and Rescue Services had undertaken their work in this way.

19.3 A meeting with Crest would be taking place on Wednesday 17 July, during which a strategic brief would be set out. All requested documentation had been submitted to them and in August, an independent staff survey would be sent out. Staff interviews and focus groups would take place in October/November 2024 in order for Crest to ascertain staff views towards culture across the last three years. Members were likely to be asked to participate in this aspect of the review.

19.4 The full report would be published in January 2025.

19.5 A Member asked if there would be any financial contribution towards this review from the Welsh Government, as the request to carry it out had come from them. The CFO confirmed that there would be no financial contribution from the Welsh Government.

20 THE OUTCOME OF THE PRE-HEARING FROM THE EMPLOYMENT TRIBUNAL

- 20.1 Members were advised that this item may still be subject to appeal and they should treat the matter as confidential.
- 20.2 Members were given some background into this item and were advised that a complaint had been issued against a senior officer in 2023. At that stage, an external investigator was secured in order to carry out an independent investigation and the Welsh Government were informed due to the seniority of the officer concerned.
- 20.3 The outcome of the investigation was discussed with both employees and in December 2023, the complainant instigated employment tribunal proceedings as they remained dissatisfied, despite the independent investigation. This then became a matter of public interest due to the appointment of the senior officer to a high-profile role within South Wales Fire and Rescue Service, and the subsequent media coverage.
- 20.4 The outcome of the hearings for the Employment Tribunal had been received and the judgment was in the public domain. The Service's position that the majority of the claims were out of time and unlikely to succeed was accepted. Two claims would now proceed, and these would go to a preliminary hearing along with two further complaints relating to the management of the grievance.
- 20.5 The employee in question was back in the workplace and was being supported by the Service.

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 21 October 2024.

Meeting closed: 11:43