

NORTH WALES FIRE AUTHORITY

These are the minutes of the Executive Panel meeting of the North Wales Fire Authority held on Monday 18th October 2004 at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Rhyl. Meeting commenced at 10am.

Present:

Councillor

Representing

T Roberts (Chairman)
M Williams (Vice-Chairman)

Gwynedd Council
Wrexham County Borough Council

S C Jones
J M Vaughan
D Jones MBE
J A Smith
D Barratt
E F Evans
E Morgan Jones
W J Chorlton
J A Roberts

Conwy County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Denbighshire County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Gwynedd 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); P L Slee (Assistant Chief Officer, Corporate Services); S Morris (Projects Officer); and Rh Evans (Member Liaison Officer).

PART I

1) Apologies

Councillor

Representing

G M Craddock
E C George
W T Owen

Wrexham County Borough Council
Wrexham County Borough Council
Gwynedd Council

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2) Notice of Urgent Matters

The Chairman advised that the following items had been submitted for consideration:

- i. Presentation of official North Wales Fire Authority shields to past Authority Members
- ii. Update on the Provisional Outturn Statement 2004/05

3) Minutes

The following minutes were submitted:

- i. Executive Panel meeting held on 26th August 2004

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

4) Matters Arising

Page 7, Item 7: Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 – The Clerk advised that following the granting of Royal Assent on 22nd July 2004, the Secretary of State had issued a commencement order which had brought the Act into force in England from 1 October 2004. As a commencement order was still awaited in Wales, Welsh fire authorities were continuing to operate under the “old” Acts. Therefore the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) was currently charged with operating fire and rescue services under two different pieces of legislation until the Assembly issued a commencement order and took over the responsibility for the fire and rescue services in Wales. The Chief Fire Officer informed members that he had recently received information which indicated that a commencement order was scheduled to be presented to the plenary session of the National Assembly for Wales (NAfW) on 10th November; with the Act coming into force in Wales from 11th November 2004. The Clerk confirmed that the Assembly did seem to delay the introduction of various acts in Wales compared to their introduction in both England and Scotland. Councillor D Jones requested, although he was aware that there was nothing the Authority could do about the delay, that his dissatisfaction with the current situation be recorded.

Page 9, Item 10: Urgent Matters – Retained Recruitment: In addition to the issue of retained recruitment Councillor W J Chorlton enquired about the current situation regarding the recruitment of wholetime firefighters. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that an exercise was currently being conducted with a view to forecasting the number of retirements within the next few years. This exercise would assist Officers to decide on the most appropriate method to be undertaken for future recruitments. Evidence currently held indicated that 4 wholetime firefighters were due to retire during the coming year. Councillor Chorlton also enquired about the number of wholetime personnel currently on detachment from their usual place of work as he was concerned that some

stations may be operating below complement. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer advised that a number of personnel were on detachments for various reasons which included career developmental purposes. The Chairman requested that a report detailing the number of personnel on detached duties for various reasons be provided to the Panel for information purposes. It was:

Resolved: - that Officers should submit a report to the Executive Panel detailing the number of personnel on detachment from their usual place of work

Page 10 - Item 12: Former Llanfairfechan Fire Station – The Chief Fire Officer informed members that since the Executive Panel's last meeting there had been a further development: the prospective tenant had recently contacted Officers expressing an interest in purchasing the site from outset rather than leasing it. The Chief Fire Officer was therefore of the view that the issue would have to be referred back to the Authority for a decision. Councillor S C Jones was of the opinion that the Authority should make every effort to accommodate the prospective buyer as it was a community based company which intended to requisition the site for the benefit of the local community. In order that members could determine the next step forward for the site, it was:

Resolved: - that a report be submitted to the Fire Authority meeting on 20th December 2004 detailing the offer from the prospective buyer and including all related costs

5) Appointment of E-Government Champion

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Support) informed members that, following the local authority elections and the subsequent changes in the membership of North Wales Fire Authority, the Authority was required to appoint a member as an E-Government Champion to replace ex-Councillor D M Morris. He explained that the member appointed would be charged with taking the lead on the delivery of E-Government at member level. The Chairman sought the Panel's nominations for the post, Councillor Malcolm Williams was nominated and seconded, no other nominations were received. It was:

Resolved: - that Councillor Malcolm Williams be appointed as North Wales Fire Authority's E-Government Champion and that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister be notified of his appointment

6) Integrated Risk Management Plan 2

The Chief Fire Officer introduced his report and draft Integrated Risk Management second year action plan (previously circulated) to members with a view to seeking their agreement to the Action Plan in order that a public consultation could be undertaken. He explained to the Panel that this report followed on from the previous reports submitted to members at the Panel's last meeting on 26th August 2004 and the Fire Authority's meeting on 20th September 2004 respectively. The latter meeting had authorised the Panel to develop the

proposed second year action plan and to make any amendments, additions and alterations they deemed appropriate prior to consulting with the public on the proposals on the Authority's behalf. The Chief Fire Officer informed members that, during recent meetings with National Assembly officials and representatives of the Audit Commission in Wales, officers had been reassured that Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) would continue to be the vehicle by which the fire and rescue services in Wales was to be modernised. He also confirmed that the draft Wales Programme for Improvement (WPI) document for fire and rescue authorities was due to be published for consultation during November 2004.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Service Delivery) Paul Claydon was invited to detail the contents of the draft second year action plan to members. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Claydon explained that the action plan, titled "Your Service, Your Safety, Your Voice", had, in accordance with the guidelines received, been compiled with a view to complementing and carrying forward the Authority's first IRMP action plan and not to replace it. He then proceeded to take the Panel through each of the risk areas listed in the document, detailing the financial implications of each proposal, how each one linked to the proposals contained in the first IRMP action plan, and the actions required to manage each risk area. The Panel was also given a summary of the progress to date along with information on the objectives for the second year in relation to each specific risk area. Whilst detailing each risk area in the draft action plan the Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Claydon invited, and duly answered members' questions. In reply to members' questions Officers advised that the process of implementing the new management structure for North Wales Fire and Rescue Service, based on unitary authority areas, had commenced. A shadow structure was already in place in preparation for the full implementation which was scheduled for 1st December 2004. Group Managers and Community Safety Managers were in post and were currently studying and commenting on each local authority's community safety plan. Members were informed that it was encouraging to report on a number of very positive aspects of the Service's work within the community: the establishment of a new Young Firefighters' Association (YFA) branch at Holyhead, and the nomination of a member of the Service's personnel, by the Prince's Trust, for Trust's Team Leader of the Year Award. It was the second successive year that a member of staff had been nominated for this award.

In relation to risk area 3 "Repeated False Alarms Generated by Automatic Fire Alarms are Dangerous" members were informed that guidance notes for the consideration of policies to deal with unwanted calls from automatic fire alarms had recently been published. The Chief Fire Officer advised that the guidance seemed to differ considerably to some of the methods trialled in various areas on the most effective way of dealing with these types of incidents. In due course, the Authority would need to decide whether it was going to adopt the procedures outlined in the guidance for dealing with these calls or whether it would take an alternative approach. The Chief Fire Officer said that, since the idea of possibly charging for responding to persistently "offending systems" had

been suggested, the owners of these “offending systems” seemed to be more willing to discuss with the Service how best to manage the systems. He undertook to write to members detailing the procedures already developed by the Authority for the reduction in response to these types of calls, including the number of calls received, the methods by which attendance or non-attendance was determined and the savings achieved to date. The Chief Fire Officer stressed that the primary purpose for adopting a new approach in this area was not cost driven, it was to ensure the availability of appliances and personnel to attend genuine emergencies.

In relation to risk area 5 “Working days not matching our busy times” members were informed that the new start and finish times for the shift system on day crewed stations, approved under the Authority’s first IRMP, would become operational from January 2005. Following receipt of legal advice the statutory 90 day notice of the change in shift times had been sent to all operational personnel working the day crewing system. The Panel requested that, for clarification purposes, all references to “part-time contracts” throughout this risk area be substituted with a more appropriate description, and that an additional point be included in the “What we intend to do next” field: “the start and finish times of shifts at day crewed stations be monitored for effectiveness”. In reply to a point raised as to whether it would be appropriate for the Authority to receive an update report on the progress made to date on the first year action plan, the Chief Fire Officer advised that, due to the escalation of the industrial dispute during the summer, some of the changes included in the first year’s action plan had not been implemented until the resolution of the dispute. It would, therefore, be extremely difficult, if not premature, to provide a worthwhile progress report at this stage.

On risk area 6 “Have we got the balance right?” the Panel was reassured by both the Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Claydon that the results of the projects and reviews undertaken would be closely analysed before any decisions were taken. The results and recommendations would, in due course, be reported to the Panel. Any proposed changes in the allocation of operational personnel crewing frontline and specialist appliances would need to be approved by members. Councillor W J Chorlton enquired whether Officers were aware of a recent article that had appeared in a Sunday newspaper stating that a private company was exploring the possibilities of operating fire and rescue service control rooms. The Chief Fire Officer reminded members that the Assembly’s Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration had consistently repeated her commitment to keeping the three Welsh fire authorities and their separate control rooms for the foreseeable future. No guarantee could be given that a review of control rooms would never take place.

In relation to risk area 7 “Arson an Increasing Menace” members were advised that the Authority was currently making tremendous progress in this area especially with the arrangements for the establishment of an “Arson Reduction Team” in North Wales.

On risk area 8 "The Service wasn't set up for this – Our structure can't support it" the Panel was informed that major planning was underway on the new internal organisational structure and that the new arrangements were due to become fully operational from 1st December 2004.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Claydon then proceeded to explain that the four areas which been earmarked as "Challenges for the Future" in the original IRMP were again to be included under this section in the second year action plan. Considerably more research work was required on each of these areas before any firm conclusions could be formed. In reply to a request that a report be prepared detailing the financial and resource implications of co-responding and how co-responding would impact on the Ambulance Service, the Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Claydon advised that the preliminary exploration work undertaken to date was still at a very early stage and, as the National Framework for Wales document had not been published it would be inappropriate and premature at this stage to present any findings to the Authority. It was almost certain that co-responding would be included in the National Framework for Wales document and it would therefore become mandatory for fire and rescue authorities to provide the service. Once detailed information was available it would be reported to the Panel.

Councillor S C Jones was of the view that another challenge for the future was the cost implications of the firefighters' pension scheme. Members were informed by the Chief Fire Officer that a consultation paper had recently been published on a proposed new pension scheme for firefighters. Responses to the proposals were required by 14th January 2005. The Chief Fire Officer reminded members that the Authority, due to its prudent financial management, was in the fortunate position of having anticipated the possible cost impact of future retirements and had therefore made provision for it. This provision was reviewed regularly and a report was presented to the Authority on an annual basis, the latest position having been reported to the Authority at its meeting in September 2004.

The Panel was advised that the proposal for consulting on the second year action plan was to follow the same method as adopted for the original IRMP and action plan, with responses to be submitted by 31st January 2005. Members:

Resolved: - to

- i. note the contents of the report;***
- ii. make the following amendments to risk area 5 "Our working days don't match our busy times" in the draft action plan:***
 - for clarification purposes, a more appropriate description be substituted for the term "part-time" contracts in this risk area, and***
 - include an additional point in the "What we intend to do next" field titled – "the start and finish times of shift times at day crewed stations be monitored for effectiveness";***

- iii. that Officers initiate a consultation exercise with the public on the second year action plan with responses to be received by the 31st January 2005; and*
- iv. that following the consultation, a report be presented to the Executive Panel for consideration of any amendments to be made to the second year action plan prior to its presentation to the Fire Authority for approval by 31st March 2005*

7) Sickness Absences

The Chief Fire Officer introduced his report (previously circulated) informing members of the decisions taken by him following consultation with the Chairman in respect of the granting of extension of sick pay. He explained that this was a standard information item and that all the details were contained in the report. Members:

Resolved: -to note the report

8) Members' Allowance Scheme

The Clerk introduced his report and the draft "Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances" (previously circulated) with a view to seeking the Panel to agree recommendations to the Fire Authority on the terms of a scheme of Members' Allowances following the National Assembly's approval of the Regulations. He thanked both the Treasurer and the Assistant Chief Officer (Corporate Services) for their work in compiling the Draft Scheme. Prior to detailing the information included in his report, and in response to a request made at the last Fire Authority meeting, the Clerk provided members with details of the allowances paid to members of North Wales Police Authority.

Members were advised by the Clerk that in drafting the Scheme officers had assumed that the Authority would wish to pay the maximum amount permitted by the Regulations. The Chairman informed the Panel that he had discussed this issue with Officers and had requested that the maximum amount be proposed, as the Regulations did not permit the backdating of payments for any period prior to the 29th September 2004, the date the Regulations came into force. The Chairman then proceeded to read an e-mail he had received from Councillor D D Millar following the Fire Authority meeting in September. In his e-mail Councillor Millar stated that he did not oppose the payment of a Special Responsibilities Allowance (SRA) to the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Authority, but felt that the payment of a basic allowance to all members should be dependent upon actual attendance at meetings. In reply to this point the Clerk advised that the Regulations did not provide for the allowance to be tied to attendance. Therefore the Authority would not be able to include a proviso to that effect in its Scheme. Conwy County Borough Council members on the Panel commented that Councillor Millar was no longer a representative on the Authority. The Council's Conservative Group had recently submitted a nomination as his

replacement to the Council's Cabinet. The Clerk advised that he had not been notified of any changes in membership recently.

Members were informed by the Clerk that expenses claims in connection with Fire Authority permitted business should now be submitted to the Member Liaison Officer at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters and not to their own councils. Following the meeting a letter would be issued to all Authority members informing them of the new procedure. The Chairman requested that members kept a record of any mileage travelled on Fire Authority permitted business and any receipts for refreshments purchased in order that they may claim reimbursement once the Scheme received approval. He pointed out to members that no payments could be made until the Scheme had received the approval of the Fire Authority at its meeting in December 2004, but that reimbursements would then be made in accordance with the Scheme's provisions. The Panel was advised by the Clerk that the draft Scheme did not provide for the payment of any allowances or expenses to substitute members. Therefore, if a substitute did deputise for a member of the Authority at any meeting they would not be eligible to claim an allowance and the cost of any travelling and subsistence expenses would have to be borne by the constituent authority. He suggested to the Panel that it might, at another meeting, wish to give consideration to whether the Authority's current practice of allowing substitute members should continue.

In reply to a question from Councillor D Barratt on whether the Authority should raise the issue of the apparent disparity in the rates of allowances paid to Fire Authority members in comparison to Police Authority members, the Chairman advised that the Regulations would be reviewed by the Assembly after 18 months. The Clerk suggested that the Fire Authority may wish to raise this issue with the Assembly in future, but stressed that the Police Authority met on a more frequent basis than the Fire Authority and that it also operated more committees. The Panel:

Resolved: - to recommend to the Fire Authority at its meeting on the 20th December 2004 to:

- i. approve the Draft Scheme for the Payment of Members' Allowances and adopt it as North Wales Fire Authority's scheme;***
- ii. that the "Approved Duties" as detailed in Schedule 1 to the Draft Scheme be agreed as the approved duties list for which members could claim travel and subsistence expenses from the Fire Authority in connection with "permitted business";***
- iii. that the rates for the Basic Allowance, Special Responsibilities Allowances and travel and subsistence allowances payable to members be approved as detailed in Schedule 2 to the Draft Scheme; and***
- iv. that a letter be issued to all Fire Authority members detailing the procedures to be followed from October 2004 onwards for the***

submission of any expenses claims for Fire Authority permitted business

9) Urgent Matters

i. Presentation of official North Wales Fire Authority shields to past Authority

Members: The Chairman informed members that he had received a request, via Councillor J A Smith, that all retiring Fire Authority members should be presented with the Authority's official shield, bearing its coat of arms. Members were of the view that a certain criteria had to be met and protocols adhered to before a shield could be presented to a member. It was:

Resolved: - that a report should be submitted to the Fire Authority's December meeting listing the proposed criteria to be met and the protocols to be adhered to for the presentation of official North Wales Fire Authority shields to Authority members

ii. Update on the Provisional Outturn Statement 2004/05: The Treasurer advised that following the query raised by Councillor E F Evans at the Authority's September's meeting the Provisional Outturn Statement had been re-examined. During this process a fault had been identified on one of the spreadsheets which had resulted in the incorrect total being shown on the "Best Value Format" of the Provisional Outturn Statement. The error, which did not alter the overall projected outturn figure reported to the Authority at that meeting, had since been rectified. A letter of explanation, including an apology for the error, along with a revised copy of the projected outturn statement, had been sent to all members. Councillor E F Evans indicated that he was satisfied with the explanation given.

10) Date(s) of future meetings

The Chairman advised that Councillor E C George had requested that the Panel should give consideration, when setting the dates for future meetings, to whether they could be held during the afternoon as he encountered difficulties with attending on Monday mornings due to other commitments with his own authority. Members considered and discussed the request but were of the view that changing the meetings to afternoon meetings would impact on other members. It was:

Resolved: - to hold the Executive Panel's next meeting on Monday 31st January 2005 at 10:30am at Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters, Rhyl

PART II

No business.

Meeting concluded at 11:40am.

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

Signed: T Roberts

Dated: 31 January, 2005