

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

Minutes of the Executive Panel Meeting of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on 9 May 2016 at Fire and Rescue Headquarters, St Asaph. Meeting commenced at 10am.

PRESENT

Cllr P R Lewis (Chair)	Conwy County Borough Council
Cllr L W Davies	Anglesey County Council
Cllr G Lowe	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

ALSO PRESENT:

D Docx (Deputy Chief Fire Officer); 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); S Morris (Corporate Planning Manager); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer); S Barry (Wales Audit Office).

APOLOGIES

Cllr M LI Davies	Denbighshire County Council
Cllr B Dunn	Flintshire County Council
Cllr T A Edwards	Wrexham County Borough Council
Cllr R O Jones	Anglesey County Council
Cllr A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council
S A Smith	Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive

1 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

1.1 None

2 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

2.1 None

3 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 FEBRUARY 2016

3.1 The minutes of the last meeting were submitted for approval.

3.2 **RESOLVED to approve the minutes as a true and correct record.**

4 MATTERS ARISING

4.1 There were no matters arising.

5 IMPROVEMENT PLANNING WORKING GROUP PROGRESS REPORT

5.1 The DCFO delivered a presentation summarising the recent discussions at meetings of the Improvement Planning Working Group. The Working Group met on four occasions to develop improvement and well-being objectives for 2017/18.

5.2 Having considered the savings and service improvements already achieved, and the agreed projects and pressures faced by NWFRS, it was recognised that with a funding gap of £1.7million by 2018/19 and diminishing financial reserves, steps will need to be taken to help ensure the sustainability of services.

5.3 Following lengthy and detailed discussions, the IP Working Group members felt that the existing improvement objective to freeze the budget would not be feasible. Although sympathetic and very aware of the financial pressures facing the majority of public services, members had reflected on the unavoidable cost pressures which NWFRS will have to face over the next three years due to issues such as pay and price inflation and in particular changing government policy around pensions.

5.4 In order to resolve the budget issue, the IP Working Group members recommended that the Authority use a combination of financial reserves, increasing contributions from the constituent authorities and making service reductions; this new three-year strategy would see the Authority through to 2019/20, and would include maintaining a frozen budget in the last two of those three years.

5.5 Cllr McGuill assured members that the IP Working Group had carefully considered several options to save money including various service reduction suggestions. The impact of the increase in contributions on local authorities had also been considered, however, it was felt that this was the 'least damaging' option in the current circumstances; these sentiments were echoed by the Chair. All those present were also reminded that North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority had frozen its budget for the last six years apart from one increase in 2015-16 of 16p per head of population, and therefore felt that the Authority would be justified in increasing the contribution amounts for one year. It was recognised that service reductions will still be required to make the necessary savings by 2019/20, however, these will not be as severe as they could be if the increase in contributions was not agreed.

- 5.6 It was noted that the IP Working Group recommended that the other three existing improvement objectives remain and that they should continue into the next financial year; and recommended that improvement objective 2 should be amended to read as follows:

The Authority will adopt a three-year financial strategy that combines the use of reserves, an increase in financial contributions and service reductions.

- 5.7 **RESOLVED to**
(i) note the progress of the Improvement Planning Working Group; and
(ii) approve the four objectives listed below for consideration by the Authority at its meeting in June 2016.

1. To help to keep people and communities safe by preventing deaths and injuries from accidental fires in living accommodation.
2. (NEW) The Authority will adopt a three-year financial strategy that combines the use of reserves, an increase in financial contributions and service reductions.
3. The Authority will re-balance its resources to match risk. It will implement a new model of resourcing which ensures the availability of at least 20 strategically located fire crews in North Wales at times of relatively lower risk, and at least 38 at times of relatively higher risk.
4. The Authority will explore opportunities to diversify the role of the firefighter and offer additional services to the public of North Wales.

6 FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

- 6.1 The DCFO introduced Steve Barry from the Wales Audit Office who presented the assessment of the Authority's financial resilience to Members.
- 6.2 Mr Barry explained that the work had been undertaken across all local authorities and FRAs in Wales. The assessment was undertaken during the period May to October 2015. The focus of the work was on delivery of 2014-15 savings plans, and the 2015-16 financial planning period and focused on answering the following question: 'Is North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) managing budget reductions effectively to ensure financial resilience?'.
- 6.3 Mr Barry and his colleague had been satisfied with the Authority's financial arrangements around financial planning, deliverance against the plan and the strength of financial control and governance; also the effective role of Members in monitoring and scrutinising the budget.

- 6.4 The assessment reported that the Authority's arrangements to achieve financial resilience are sound, in that:
- the Authority has reduced expenditure by eight per cent compared to 2011-12 and levels of reserves are increasing;
 - financial planning is supported by a budget strategy together with an understanding of key risks and challenges;
 - financial control is supported by effective budget monitoring and forecasting and the Authority has a good track record of managing budgets;
 - financial governance is effective and supported by clear challenge from Authority members, accurate reporting and commitment at a senior level.
- 6.5 Members were very pleased to note the positive assessment. The importance of having a financial strategy in place was also highlighted and it was noted that without such a strategy the Authority would very quickly be considered as high risk.
- 6.6 **RESOLVED to welcome the assessment and note the information contained in the report.**
- 7 CO-RESPONDING PILOT
- 7.1 ACFO Fairhead updated Members on the progress and initial findings of the co-responding pilot being carried out by North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (NWFRS).
- 7.2 NWFRS and WAST have worked together since August 2015 to develop the principles around how the pilot would operate in North Wales and to train individuals to undertake the work. Personnel from six stations across North Wales are part of the pilot which started on 11 January.
- 7.3 It was noted that between 11 January and 31 March 2016, NWFRS has received 68 requests from WAST for a co-response to attend medical emergencies. To date, NWFRS has attended a total of 23 incidents. The patient outcome of the 23 incidents attended has been considered extremely good by WAST, with 12 casualties being treated and either discharged at the scene or transported to hospital. It was noted that the reasons for non-attendance by NWFRS have been either no crew available, incident outside pre-agreed area or crews stood down by WAST.
- 7.4 In response to a member's question about the future of this work, it was explained that the National Joint Council had instigated the pilot and once it has concluded there would be an evaluation of its success. It was confirmed that in North Wales, there has been positive feedback from those who have taken part in the pilot; monthly meetings are held with senior managers to discuss any issues and improvements have been made during the pilot. It was also noted that the pilot had been positive in terms of joint working with WAST.

- 7.5 Cllr Lowe considered it an encouraging report and all Members wished to note their appreciation and thanks to those who are taking part in the pilot.
- 7.6 **RESOLVED to welcome and note the information and progress made by NWFRS in developing the co-responding trial and the positive outcomes achieved through NWFRS intervention for 52% of the casualties.**
- 8 FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY BUDGET 2015-16 SUPPORTING PROJECTS – UPDATE FOLLOWING FIRST 12 MONTHS OF IMPLEMENTATION
- 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 These arrangements had been introduced on 1 April 2015 and it was noted that during the financial year, the Service had received one call requesting a rope rescue and 16 calls requesting large animal rescue; of all these calls, only one attendance had been made to a large animal rescue.
- 8.3 In terms of the AFAs, 1303 calls had been received and the Service had not attended 1219 of these calls. The savings to the Authority of not attending the 1219 false alarms from AFA systems can be split into cashable savings, where the non-attendance at AFAs has resulted in RDS crews not being mobilised and therefore a direct cost saving of £67,889.50 and non cashable savings where wholetime crews on duty have not been mobilised to 519 AFAs and therefore have been able to use their time more effectively on activities such as community safety work or training.
- 8.4 The Chair commented that the outcomes reported endorsed the decisions made by the Authority with the added benefit of having made substantial financial savings. Members also wished to thank the staff in the Joint Communications Centre who deal with all the calls received.
- 8.5 **RESOLVED to note the positive impact of the introduction of the new policies.**
- 9 EMERGENCY SERVICE MOBILE COMMUNICATION PROGRAMME
- 9.1 The DCFO delivered a presentation updating members about the Emergency Service Mobile Communication Programme (ESMCP). In all three emergency services in the UK, the provision of radio communication, through a nationally procured contract, will expire between 2016 and 2020. A national replacement project known as the Emergency Services Mobile Communication Programme has been established by Her Majesty's Government.

- 9.2 The objectives of the project are to replace Airwave critical voice services by enhancing a commercial mobile network, to be available as Airwave contracts expire and to avoid lengthy, monolithic contracts and expensive PFI.
- 9.3 The DCFO explained that there are three main procurement lots namely, delivery partner, user services and mobile services. These contracts have now been let and work is underway to plan, design and build the new system.
- 9.4 Members had previously raised concerns about the coverage issues in North Wales, the timescale and the cost of the system. The DCFO explained that the coverage issue is being addressed through the use of 'extended area services' to enhance coverage where required across the UK. It is anticipated that Wales' implementation date will be towards the end of the roll out of the programme in 2020.
- 9.5 The WG provides a grant towards the cost of the current system but negotiations are ongoing as to whether it will contribute to the cost of the new system; the cost of implementing the new system in Wales will be approximately £8m.
- 9.6 It was noted that a new radio communications system is being purchased jointly with North Wales Police and this will be done to coincide with the implementation of the national programme.
- 9.7 **RESOLVED to note the information provided.**