

## **NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

Minutes of the meeting of **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** held on **Monday 21 October 2024** virtually via **Zoom**. Meeting commenced at **09.30hrs**.

### **Councillor**

Dylan Rees (Chair)  
Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)  
Bryan Apsley  
Carol Beard  
Tina Claydon  
Chrissy Gee  
Alan Hughes  
John Brynmor Hughes  
Gareth R Jones  
John Ifan Jones  
Marc Jones  
Gwynfor Owen  
Beverley Parry-Jones  
Arwyn Herald Roberts  
Austin Roberts  
Gareth A Roberts  
Rondo Roberts  
Paul Rogers  
Gareth Sandilands  
Dale Selvester  
Rob Triggs  
Mark Young

### **Representing**

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

### **Also present:**

Dawn Docx	Chief Fire Officer (CFO)
Stewart Forshaw	Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO)
Helen MacArthur	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Justin Evans	Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Anthony Jones	Area Manager - Transformation
Dafydd Edwards	Treasurer
Gareth Owens	Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Elgan Roberts	Head of Finance and Procurement
Steve Morris	Head of ICT
Rhian Williams	Deputy Head of Corporate Communications
Natalie Jones	Welsh Language Officer
Euros Lake	Audit Wales
Kieran Vickery	Audit Wales
Carwyn Rees	Audit Wales
Timothy Buckle	Audit Wales
George Jones	Atebol Translation Services
Ellie Williams	Members' Services
Lisa Allington	Members' Services

## 1 APOLOGIES

### **Councillor**

Sharon Doleman  
Chris Hughes

### **Representing**

Conwy County Borough Council  
Conwy County Borough Council

### **ABSENT**

### **Councillor**

Marion Bateman  
Adele Davies-Cooke  
Jeff Evans  
Michelle Walker

### **Representing**

Flintshire County Council  
Flintshire County Council  
Anglesey County Council  
Denbighshire 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 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 15 JULY 2024

4.1 The minutes of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) Annual General Meeting (AGM) held on 15 July 2024 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to:**

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

## 5 MINUTES OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE MEETING HELD ON 15 JULY 2024

5.1 The minutes of the Authority meeting held on 15 July 2024 were submitted for approval.

5.2 **RESOLVED to:**

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

## **6 MATTERS ARISING**

- 6.1 With regards to Item 7 of the minutes from the Authority's business meeting held on 15 July 2024, AM Anthony Jones was invited to provide Members with an update in relation to the Emergency Cover Review (ECR).
- 6.2 AM Jones confirmed that since the Authority decision on 15 July 2024 to continue working on two of the three research proposals presented to them in relation to the ECR, the ECR Task and Finish Group (the Group) recommenced their work on 5 September. The Chair and Deputy Chair remained the same.
- 6.3 The Group had agreed to break the Authority's recommendations down into three work streams: to develop a new wholetime duty system for Rhyl, Deeside and Wrexham, based on the Scottish five-watch system; to develop a new self-rostering day crewing system based on that of Greater Manchester; and to further develop the SWOT analysis on the implementation of riding a minimum crewing level of four across all wholetime duty system teams.
- 6.4 It was anticipated that the outcomes from the work of the Group would be brought to the Authority in 2025.

## **7 CHIEF FIRE OFFICER'S UPDATE**

- 7.1 The Chief Fire Officer (CFO) provided Members with a verbal update on a number of high-profile issues that Members had previously been provided with information for.
- 7.2 Members were informed that the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (GTI) Report Part II had been released on 4 September, seven years following the tragedy that had claimed 72 lives. This inquiry held implications for the whole of the sector, but those areas that required greater focus were: the collection and sharing of risk information; training Control Operators in mass call handling, something already carried out by the Service; and training on simultaneous evacuation, that being the evacuation of residents at the same time as an organised approach to fighting the fire.
- 7.3 On 8 October 2024, the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor for Wales, Dan Stephens, published a report following his inspection into firefighting techniques in South Wales Fire and Rescue Service. A similar inspection was being conducted into Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service and he would be coming into North Wales Fire and Rescue Service in January to carry out the same review. This was another area which would have implications for training within the Service.

- 7.4 It was expected that the findings of his report would be the same across all three Welsh FRA, as they had been UK-wide, namely that the techniques currently in use and which had been taught for the last twenty years were no longer fit for purpose. This was due to many factors, not least that homes were now better insulated with double glazing fitted as standard, and that the type of furniture and IT equipment now present in most homes were more flammable and burned at a higher temperature than those of twenty years ago.
- 7.5 In his report, the Dan Stephens stated that the techniques currently being taught and used were inappropriate, a statement backed up by research from the USA and Netherlands, and may actually be dangerous to firefighters. His recommendations, which had now been incorporated into the new UK-wide National Operational Guidance, was that old techniques would need to be unlearned and new techniques taught, resulting in the redesigning and remodelling of many old and outdated Training Centres, including that of our own Service which was 50 years old.
- 7.6 On Monday 7 October, the Social Partnership Forum, chaired by Jane Bryant, the new Minister for Fire and Rescue Services, had taken place. The focus of the meeting had been emergency cover availability in rural areas and it was important that the Minister be sighted and aware of the challenges being faced. The Minister then attended the Senedd on 9 October to receive the 'Sound the Alarm' report from the Equalities and Social Justice Committee which echoed those recommendations made in the Audit Wales report on Governance into FRA. The Minister's response would be going out to consultation in the New Year and would propose a new governance model for all three Welsh FRAs, with the intention of having it in place within the next 12 months.
- 7.7 A Member noted that the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's report highlighted that now was the ideal opportunity to work together to provide the best training facilities possible for Firefighters in North Wales.
- 7.8 Finally, Members were advised that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Stewart Forshaw, had decided to retire at the end of December. The CFO stated that he would be a great loss to the team, and expressed her appreciation of the hard work, energy and commitment he had put in to moving the culture of the Service forward, for asking those questions needed around the deployment of resources, for the improvement he had instigated in the Service's training provision and facilities, and for his Chairing of so many internal meetings which had helped to move the Service forward. The CFO gave her thanks to DCFO Forshaw for everything he had achieved, and wished him well for the future, a sentiment echoed by Members.

- 7.9 DCFO Forshaw thanked those present for their kind words and stated that it had been an honour and a privilege to be Deputy Chief Fire Officer at North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service), and that he hoped that the good work would continue into the future.

## **8 CHAIR'S REPORT**

- 8.1 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 July and September 2024.

### **8.2 RESOLVED to:**

- i) Note the information provided within the paper.**

## **9 NEW TRAINING CENTRE BUSINESS CASE**

- 9.1 ACFO Justin Evans presented to Members a business case for the development of a new training centre (the Centre) for the Service. The business case included a comprehensive review of existing facilities, outlined existing risk and included a detailed options appraisal, with a recommendation to progress a preferred option.
- 9.2 The Chair took this opportunity to remind Members that the current facilities available for training at the Service were not fit for purpose, and that upgraded provisions would need to be secured in order to prioritise the safety and wellbeing of its firefighters.
- 9.3 One Member noted the importance of making the right decision and asked what had been discussed so far with regards to partnership working, whether the facility would be able to deal with the necessary retraining of staff as touched upon within the CFO's update, and how the financing of the centre would be scrutinised in the future.
- 9.4 ACFO Evans confirmed that the retraining requirements of operational staff had been built into the business plan for the Centre, and noted that there would still be opportunities to alter the design of the Centre to meet the needs of the Service. It was hoped that the Centre would be considered a centre of excellence with regards to partnership working and whilst talks had not yet taken place, these were in the pipeline.
- 9.5 It was asked if there was a possibility of using the land in the short-term in order to offer training to staff, and ACFO Evans confirmed that there was not at the current time, in the main due to the additional expense that would be incurred in delivering this.

- 9.6 A Member queried whether there would be financial assistance available centrally in order to help fund the development of the Centre, and the Chair responded that at the last Social Partnership meeting he had put this issue to the Minister and that it was being considered. However, there was no guarantee.
- 9.7 A Member stated that the business case for the Centre demonstrated that it was an absolute necessity, and that early engagement in establishing whether any adjustments would be required in order to maximise partnership working and secure a revenue stream in this area was vital. Concern was also expressed about asking the Local Authorities for additional funds in order to pay for the Centre.
- 9.8 ACFO Evans confirmed that a small area of the land remained undeveloped within the plans and that this could be utilised in order to accommodate the needs of partners, if required.
- 9.9 A Member queried whether the Service felt that the net zero target of 2030 would be met, or whether retro fitting equipment to stations may be necessary. ACFO Evans confirmed that the impacts upon the environment were considered in every decision that was made and that all efforts were being made to meet the 2030 target.
- 9.10 One Member highlighted that the existing training centre in Dolgellau was no longer fit for purpose and that it was important to secure the best facilities possible for operational staff who put their lives on the line on a daily basis in order to protect the public. They further noted that the financial situation within Local Authorities was currently extremely challenging, and that the importance of partnership working and the revenue stream that this may generate was paramount. They also felt that pressure should be put upon those within Welsh Government for additional funding.
- 9.11 The Treasurer noted that whilst it was difficult securing funding for capital projects, some success had been experienced in the past and so it remained a possibility. Members felt that the proposal should be built around saving the emergency service sector money in the long-term.
- 9.12 A Member asked if there would be a phased approach to the development of the Centre in order to ensure continuity in the event that the existing training facilities were unavailable for use. The DCFO confirmed that some upgrades had been carried out to the training facilities in Dolgellau and so these should be useable until the new centre was up and running. However, a phased approach may still be adopted in order to safeguard the training provision.

- 9.13 It was asked why the current training facilities had not been developed over the years in order to keep up with need, and whether there were other facilities in the vicinity that could be utilised rather than developing a centre within the Service.
- 9.14 The CFO responded that as the current facilities in Dolgellau were within a National Park there were restrictions on the developments that could be made. The development of a new Centre was a project that should have been started ten years ago and had been continually postponed due to financial restrictions. It was therefore now at a stage where it was necessary and could no longer be deferred.
- 9.15 DCFO Forshaw advised that there were training facilities in Cheshire and Greater Manchester; however, the availability of training slots for other Services to utilise these were extremely limited due to the need for them to train their own staff and were often only available at the weekends which would be untenable for our own training needs.
- 9.16 The CFO informed Members that planning permission to adapt the fire station at Wrexham would be impossible to achieve due to the restrictions that would need to be put in place with regards to the times training would be allowed.
- 9.17 One Member stressed that this decision should be made by Members taking into consideration that they were there to represent the best interests of the Authority, not as representatives of their own local authority.
- 9.18 It was queried whether the proposed changes to the governance of the Authority may impact on the timing of the development of the Centre, and the CFO responded that it would not. She further clarified that there would be a need for at least three training centres across Wales, and that the recommendations of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor were that staff should not have to travel for more than one hour to receive training, which would further restrict the ability to utilise other training centres.
- 9.20 ACFO Evans advised that the biggest challenge with regards to securing planning permission was in relation to the presence of newts; however, remedial actions were being taken in order to mitigate this and the appetite for planning, during conversations with the relevant people, appeared to be favourable.
- 9.21 At this juncture, Cllr Mark Young and Cllr Gareth Sandilands declared an interest due to their membership on the Denbighshire Planning Committee.

## 9.22 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve, in principle, the development of a new centralised training centre (Option 3);**
- ii) commit to maintaining momentum in the development of the proposals, with a focus on affordability and sustainable financing options;**
- iii) authorise the Chief Fire Officer to pursue capital financing options, including self-funding, Welsh Government support, income generation or collaborative opportunities with partners; and**
- iv) delegate authority to the Chief Fire Officer to proceed with the next steps in the project.**

## **10 GOVERNANCE OF FRA BY AUDIT WALES**

- 10.1 Euros Lake from Audit Wales was introduced to Members. He presented the Audit Wales report on the governance of Fire and Rescue Authorities, and explained that as part of the Auditor General's local government studies programme in 2023-24, a review of the governance arrangements across the three Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) in Wales had been conducted.
- 10.2 The salient points from the report were highlighted and the Chair noted that areas of good practice from within the Service had been commented upon; however, there were also areas of scrutiny and challenge that required development.
- 10.3 The Clerk advised that whilst induction and training provision within the Authority were already good, plans had been put in place to develop a framework for assessing Members' training needs, and for the delivery of the same. He also noted that local authorities recognised the need for stability of membership in order to allow Members to build up expertise within the sector.
- 10.4 Another Member felt that it would be important for the Authority to have an input into the new model. The CFO agreed with this statement and advised that a formal request had been made that the Chairs and Chiefs of the Fire Authorities in Wales meet with the Cabinet Secretary outside of the Social Partnership Forum in order to facilitate open discussions on what new arrangements might look like, what it was felt should be retained and what the Minister was minded to add to it. Members were asked to provide their opinions to the Chair outside of the meeting in order that they could be incorporated into this response.



- 10.5 A Member expressed concern that requesting specific skillsets may restrict diversity, and Euros Lake agreed with this comment and confirmed that this had been noted within their report.
- 10.6 There was a general consensus that co-opting Members would be counterproductive and should not be allowed to take place.
- 10.7 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the content of the report.**

The meeting adjourned at 11:10 and recommenced at 11:20

## **11 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2023-24**

- 11.1 Elgan Roberts presented to Members the Statement of Accounts for 2023-24. The report also presented the findings of the Auditor General for Wales which confirmed an unqualified audit opinion.
- 11.2 Carwyn Rees from Audit Wales was welcomed to the meeting and asked for his thanks to the Finance Department for their hard work be noted.
- 11.3 The Chair highlighted the statement within the report that indicated that two Members had not completed and returned their Declaration of Interest forms. He stressed the importance of all Members returning these forms when requested.
- 11.4 The Chair queried the usable reserves of £9.1m and whether this was within the recommended threshold. The Treasurer responded that whilst the level of reserves were relatively high, a significant proportion of these were capital funds which were rolled over. Carwyn Rees provided a link to Members within the meeting to a sustainability tool which Members could use to compare these reserves to other organisations within the same sector.
- 11.5 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) note the audited outturn position and performance as detailed within the 2023/24 Statement of Accounts (Appendix 1);**
- ii) note the report of the Auditor General for Wales which confirms an unqualified audit opinion (Appendix 2);**
- iii) note the proposed letter of representation including the uncorrected mis-statement; and**
- iv) confirm the recommendation of approval of the final audited 2023/24 Statement of Accounts.**

## **12 FINANCIAL UPDATE 2024-257**

12.1 Dafydd Edwards, Authority Treasurer, presented the Financial Update 2024-25 paper which aimed to provide Members with an update on the revenue and capital expenditure forecast for 2024/25, as at 30 September 2024.

12.2 It was asked whether there would be any risk in connection with the Government's plans to raise Employer's National Insurance contributions within the budget. The Treasurer confirmed that there would, but that would be included within next year's budget. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that the potential impact of this raise had been accounted for, and that central government were being lobbied for additional funding.

12.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the projected revenue underspend and the projected capital slippage for the 2024/25 financial year, as detailed within the report; and**
- ii) note the risks associated with inflation, supply chain issues, and the legal challenge, where the nature of figures forecasted in this report are prudent.**

## **13 BUDGET SETTING 2025-26**

13.1 ACFO MacArthur delivered a paper to Members which set out the budget process, planning assumptions and timescales for setting the Authority's revenue budget for 2025/26.

13.2 The Chair thanked the Budget Scrutiny working group for their input into the budget setting process.

13.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the planning assumptions being used to develop the revenue budget for 2025/26;**
- ii) note the remit of the Budget Scrutiny Working Group established by the Audit Committee and the proposed reporting timetable;**
- iii) note the proposal to provide initial budget estimates to the Executive Panel at its meeting of 16 December 2023; and**
- iv) note the proposal to seek approval for the 2025/26 revenue budget by the Authority at its meeting of 20 January 2025.**

## **14 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT 2023-24**

14.1 AM Anthony Jones presented for Members' approval the annual assessment of the Authority's performance in achieving its Improvement and Well-Being Objectives, and medium-term Equality Objectives during 2023/24.

14.2 The Chair thanked Officers for the work that had gone into producing this report, which had previously been scrutinised and endorsed by the Executive Panel.

14.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the contents of the Annual Performance Assessment for the period 2023/24; and**
- ii) approve the Annual Performance Assessment 2023/24 for publication on the Fire and Rescue Authority's website.**

## **15 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2023-24**

15.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented to the Authority the Annual Governance Statement, as required by The Accounts and Audit (Wales) Regulations 2014. It was confirmed that a draft had been submitted to Audit Wales prior to 31 May 2024, as required by the aforementioned legislation.

15.2 The Chair noted that there was a statutory requirement to produce the Annual Governance Statement, and that it had already been signed off by Audit Wales.

15.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the governance arrangements outlined within the 2023/24 Annual Governance Statement;**
- ii) note the forward work plan for 2024/25; and**
- iii) approve the 2023/24 Annual Government Statement for publication on the Authority's website by 31 October 2024.**

## **16 WELSH LANGUAGE STANDARD 2023-24**

16.1 Natalie Jones, Welsh Language Officer, presented for Members' approval the Welsh Language Standards Annual Monitoring Report for 2023/24 in relation to compliance with Welsh Language Standards 155,161,167, that detail the Authority must produce a monitoring report each financial year.

16.2 Members asked for their congratulations be passed on to the Department for the hard work that they carry out in this important area, and for the commitment of the Service to the Welsh language.

16.3 One Member queried how the training programme was monitored to ensure that members of staff develop their standard of Welsh to the required level. The Welsh Language Officer confirmed that opportunities for them to develop their language skills were regularly provided and records were kept and reviewed annually.

16.4 DCFO Forshaw further advised that a great deal of work was carried out in order to promote the Welsh language within the Service, and that this was fed back to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee as part of the monitoring process. ACFO MacArthur also asked Members to note that the Welsh language requirements were part of the probationary process for all new staff members.

16.5 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the Welsh Language Standards Annual Monitoring Report for 2023/34 for publication on the Authority's website; and**
- ii) note the Service's intention to publicise the document as noted in Standards 155,161,167.**

## **17 DRAFT COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 25/26**

17.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented the draft Community Risk Management Implementation Plan for 2025-26 to Members, and advised Members that the Service sought to seek approval to consult with the public on the proposed improvement and well-being objectives.

17.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) note the content of the report; and**
- ii) approve the draft Community Risk Management Implementation Plan 2025/26 for consultation with Authority Members, staff, relevant trade unions, stakeholders and the public prior to approval at the meeting of the Authority in March 2025.**

## **18 HEATING DECARBONISATION PLAN**

18.1 ACFO Justin Evans delivered the Heating Decarbonisation Plan, which provided detailed measures and timescales to mitigate the carbon emissions arising from the heating of the estate for the period up to 2030.

18.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) approve the Heating Decarbonisation Plan.**

## **19 COMPLAINTS, PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURES AND EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION**

19.1 ACFO Helen MacArthur provided Members with an update on external complaints and expressions of appreciation received by the Service between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024.

19.2 The Chair noted that members of the public were highly likely to express their appreciation of the Service via social media and that these were not reflected within the figures.

19.3 **RESOLVED to:**

**i) note the contents of the report.**

## **20 URGENT MATTERS**

20.1 There were no urgent matters to consider.

It was noted that the next meeting would take place on 20 January 2025.

**Meeting closed: 11:43**