

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

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 20 September 2021 virtually via Zoom. Meeting commenced at 10.00am.

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Representing</b>
P R Lewis (Chair)	Conwy County Borough Council
D Rees	Anglesey County Council
R Griffiths	Anglesey County Council
R E Parry	Conwy County Borough Council
N Smith	Conwy County Borough Council
B Blakeley	Denbighshire County Council
M Ll Davies	Denbighshire County Council
P Evans	Denbighshire County Council
M Bateman	Flintshire County Council
A I Dunbar	Flintshire County Council
P Shotton	Flintshire County Council
W O Thomas	Flintshire County Council
D Wisinger	Flintshire County Council
J B Hughes	Gwynedd Council
J W Parry	Gwynedd Council
G A Roberts	Gwynedd Council
B Apsley	Wrexham County Borough Council
M Dixon	Wrexham County Borough Council
G Lowe	Wrexham County Borough Council
A Roberts	Wrexham County Borough Council

### **Also present:**

D Docx (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); C P Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority); G Owens (Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer); R Fairhead, H MacArthur and S Millington (Assistant Chief Fire Officers); S Morris (Assistant Chief Officer); H Howard (Head of Finance); T Williams (Corporate Communications Manager); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer).

The Chair formally welcomed Dawn Docx to her first meeting as Chief Fire Officer.

### 1 APOLOGIES

<b>Councillor</b>	<b>Representing</b>
A Davies	Denbighshire County Council
S Lloyd-Williams	Conwy County Borough Council
B Parry-Jones	Wrexham County Borough Council
A Tansley	Conwy County Borough Council

## 2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 There were no declarations of interest.

## 3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3 There was no notice of urgent matters.

## 4 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 JUNE 2021

4.1 The minutes of the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 21 June were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to approve minutes of the meeting as a true and correct record.**

## 5 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 There were no matters arising.

## 6 CHAIR'S REPORT

6.1 The Chair informed Members of meetings and events he had attended over the Summer months.

6.2 In addition to the regular meetings with the Deputy Chair and Chief Fire Officer, they had attended a meeting with the WLGA and colleagues from FRAs across Wales to discuss items of mutual interest. These included the role of the Firefighter, the Emergency Services Network (ESN) and the fire safety of buildings.

6.3 Members were well aware of the extensive delay with the ESN and the significant additional cost involved. It was noted that although the WG had agreed to continue its existing contribution of £1.6m, the additional costs continued to grow with a shortfall of £1m which was increasing.

6.4 In terms of the building fire safety, there was concern at the lack of funds in Wales for landlords to assess their buildings; the CFO will be progressing this issue with colleagues across Wales.

6.5 The Chair was pleased to have been able to represent the Authority at the ceremony of achievement for Future Leaders Apprentices at Rhyl Fire Station and at the Long Service Awards ceremony at Headquarters.

6.6 At this juncture, the Chair informed Members that this was Colin Everett's last meeting prior to his retirement. The Chair paid tribute to Mr Everett for his counsel and for bringing considerable professionalism to the role of the Clerk to the Authority since 2008. Members showed their appreciation through a round of applause. Mr Everett thanked the Chair and wished the Authority well for the future.

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

7 COVID-19 UPDATE

7.1 ACFO Fairhead gave Members an update about COVID-19 related activities and the latest situation within the Service.

7.2 The Service is continuing its process of both recovery and preparation of new ways of working in the future. The Service is represented on the Recovery Co-ordination Group and still making staff available to WAST for driving duties.

7.3 Members were pleased to note that Phoenix week-long courses had been reconvened with robust risk assessments in place to protect all involved.

7.4 In terms of other aspects of community safety, it was noted that although safe and well checks in person had been undertaken for the most vulnerable people in communities throughout the pandemic, the Service was now moving to delivering a greater number of these checks in person and Members will be kept informed of progress. The business fire safety team was now also undertaking more audits in person of commercial buildings in order to monitor fire safety provisions.

7.5 The Service continues to follow government advice and is working towards a new normal through the internal business continuity management group and gradually more meetings in person are taking place with the appropriate safety measures in place.

7.6 ACFO Fairhead, on behalf of the Principal Officers' team, paid tribute to all staff in every function, department and station in the way they have worked through the pandemic and continue to do so – without their professionalism and commitment, essential services could not have continued to be delivered since March 2020. Members were equally appreciative of all staff endeavours since the start of the pandemic.

7.7 **RESOLVED to note the update.**

8 ANNUAL PERFORMANCE DRAFT ASSESSMENT APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021

8.1 ACO Morris presented the draft assessment of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority's performance during 2020/21 in relation to its progress towards achieving its long-term Improvement and Well-Being Objectives, medium-term Equality Objectives and its compliance with applicable Welsh Language Standards.

8.2 It was noted that, despite the pandemic, the Authority made good progress last year towards meeting its long-term Improvement and Well-Being Objectives. This was achieved in part through the successful delivery of the planned actions outlined in the Authority's published Improvement and Well-being Plan for 2020/21. Steady progress was also made during the year towards achieving the Authority's 2016-20 Equality Objectives; and the Authority continued to comply with the applicable Welsh Language Standards.

8.3 In response to a Member's question, it was confirmed that the WG would provide the data around response times and it was anticipated that this would be available prior to the deadline date of publishing the document.

8.4 Members were very complimentary about the quality of the comprehensive document; the evidence in the document clearly demonstrated the progress made during the year in order to achieve the objectives. Members also wished to congratulate staff for achieving the objectives during the pandemic.

8.5 ACO Morris paid tribute to the Corporate Planning Team, and especially to the authors of the performance assessment document who joined the Service in December 2020. Richard Noble and Gillian Wilson had been able to learn the job whilst working remotely and had analysed and collated all the data required by electronic means.

8.6 **RESOLVED to:**

- (i) approve the draft assessment of the Authority's performance in 2020/21 (subject to minor additions and corrections if required) for publication on the Authority's website by 30/09/2021; and**
- (ii) note the Service's intention to publish a simple summary version of the key elements of the assessment report.**

## 9 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2021/22

- 9.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the report which outlined the projected revenue and capital expenditure position for 2021/22, as at 31 July 2021.
- 9.2 It was noted that the forecast outturn position remains that the Authority will achieve a breakeven position against the revenue budget of £37.07m.
- 9.3 Members were reminded that the capital programme remains under review, due to the ongoing Covid 19 restrictions, and that a revised capital plan of £2.985m was agreed at the meeting on 15 March 2021.
- 9.4 Members were informed that during the course of the year it had been necessary to review the allocation of the budget across the income and expenditure headings. The table below gave details of the original and revised budgets. Members noted that it is anticipated that further refinements will be required during the financial year to reflect the ongoing challenges.

<b>Budget heading</b>	<b>Approved March 2021 £'000</b>	<b>Revised July 2021 £'000</b>	<b>Adjustment £'000</b>
Employees	28,360	28,411	51
Premises	2,687	2,725	38
Transport	1,003	983	-20
Supplies and Services	4,976	4,973	-3
Capital Financing	2,467	2,467	0
Income	-2,419	-2,485	-66
<b>Total</b>	<b>37,074</b>	<b>37,074</b>	<b>0</b>

- 9.5 The Chair thanked the Finance staff for an excellent report and Members noted the likely effect of inflation increases on the budget for this financial year and in future years. The Chair also commented that hopefully the Authority will be able to apply for any WG financial help that will be offered.
- 9.6 **RESOLVED to**
- (i) **note the draft revenue and capital outturn projections for the 2021/22 financial year as detailed within the report; and**
  - (ii) **approve the budget realignment request.**

## 10 LEGAL CHALLENGE TO THE 2015 PENSION REFORMS

- 10.1 In addition to the report presented to Members, ACFO MacArthur also gave a presentation detailing the issues and challenges involved with the legal challenge.
- 10.2 Following the presentation, ACFO Millington gave an overview of the impact of the pension issues on the operational aspects of the Service.
- 10.3 It was confirmed that those at risk of immediate detriment were being supported by the Service and that all members were receiving regular communication.
- 10.4 Members were grateful to ACFO MacArthur for providing a presentation that clearly explained the complex situation; Cllr Apsley as a Member of the Local Pension Board commented that the situation was indeed very complex and that the information provided in layman's terms was very much welcomed.
- 10.5 **RESOLVED to**
- (i) note the current position with regards to remedy; and**
  - (ii) approve the recommendation that immediate detriment cases are only progressed following guidance from legal advisors including appropriate indemnities.**

At this juncture, Cllr R Griffiths left the meeting.

## 11 ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY BOARD MEMBER AND SUSTAINABILITY CHAMPION

- 11.1 ACO Morris presented the report which sought the nomination of a Member of the Fire and Rescue Authority to sit on the Service's Environmental Strategy Board and act as a sustainability champion for the Authority until the end of April 2022.
- 11.2 ACO Morris explained that Objective 6 of the Authority's Corporate Plan 2021-24 commits the Authority to develop ways of becoming more environmentally conscious in order to minimise the impact of its activity on the environment. One action under this objective is to establish a strategic board with responsibility for developing an Environmental Strategy for the Authority.
- 11.3 Cllr D Rees nominated Cllr M Dixon and this was seconded by all Members.
- 11.4 **RESOLVED to nominate Cllr Michael Dixon to sit on the Environmental Strategy Board and act as the Authority's Sustainability Champion until the end of April 2022.**

## 12 PRINCIPAL OFFICERS' PAY AWARD 2021

12.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the report which asked Members to note and endorse the arrangements for agreeing the annual pay awards for Principal Officers for 2021.

### 12.2 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) approve the pay award of 1.5% for the Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officers with effect from 1 January 2021;**
- (ii) note the negotiating and approval arrangements relating to the pay awards for Assistant Chief Officers and Treasurer;**
- (iii) note the current position of the JNC with regards to the pay award for 2021 for the Assistant Chief Officers and Treasurer; and**
- (iv) agree to the payment of the pending award for the Assistant Chief Officers and Treasurer once the national JNC negotiations are concluded.**

## 13 THE INCLUSIVE FIRE SERVICE GROUP (IFSG)

13.1 ACO Morris presented the report which updated Members on the work of the Inclusive Fire Service Group (IFSG).

13.2 It was noted that the IFSG, chaired by Councillor Sue Lloyd-Williams, had driven improvements in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion within the Service since 2017. Due to the progress made in embedding these aspects into day-to-day business it had been recommended that formal meetings of the IFSG were no longer required.

13.3 Cllr Apsley was of the view that a report detailing the work and achievements of the IFSG should be presented to Members prior to the Authority agreeing to discontinue formal meetings of the IFSG. Cllr Apsley therefore proposed that the second recommendation in the report be postponed until such report is made available; Members agreed this proposal.

### 13.4 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) note the progress made in embedding the work of the IFSG;**
- (ii) note the intention to bring to a future meeting a report detailing the work and achievements of the IFSG since 2017 ;**
- (iii) delay the decision to discontinue formal meetings of the IFSG until the report in (ii) above has been received.**

## 14 CONSTITUTION REVIEW

14.1 The Deputy Clerk gave an update on the review of the constitution which is currently ongoing. A meeting of the review group had been convened and a further meeting scheduled for mid-October, thereafter it is expected that a revised constitution will be presented to the Authority.

14.2 **RESOLVED to note the update.**

## 15 REVIEW OF WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

15.1 The Deputy Clerk presented, for approval, the revised whistleblowing policy as amended by the Standards Committee.

15.2 The Deputy Clerk explained that the Standards Committee as part of its terms of reference had previously been required "to oversee the whistleblowing regime". Following a recent review of the policy, a number of changes to its wording had been proposed and a change of ownership from the Standards Committee to the Audit Committee.

15.3 Members agreed that oversight of the regime should sit with the Audit Committee due to the links that exist with financial probity rather than the members' code of conduct.

15.4 **RESOLVED to approve:**

- (i) the proposed changes to the policy;**
- (ii) the Audit Committee should in future have oversight of the whistleblowing regime.**

At this juncture, Cllr G A Roberts left the meeting.

Prior to discussing this item, Helen MacArthur, Gareth Owens and Matt Georgiou were removed from the meeting.

## 16 APPOINTMENT TO POSTS OF MONITORING OFFICER AND TREASURER

16.1 The CFO presented the report which advised Members on the requirements of the statutory posts of Monitoring Officer and Treasurer; seek approval to enter into a competitive process for the appointment thereof with effect from 1 April 2022 and propose interim arrangements for both roles.



- 16.2 The roles of Monitoring Officer and Treasurer are statutory posts which must be held by named individuals with the relevant knowledge, skills and experience. The posts will become vacant from 31 March 2022. It is proposed that in the interim Gareth Owens undertakes the role of the Monitoring Officer and Helen MacArthur undertakes the duties of the Treasurer with support from the outgoing Treasurer
- 16.3 It was noted that this matter had been considered by the Executive Panel at its meeting on 26 July 2021. Members recommended that a competitive process be entered into for both statutory posts and that an Appointments Committee be established comprising one representative from each constituent authority. The appointments will need approval of the full Authority following recommendation from the Committee.
- 16.4 **RESOLVED to:**
- (i) approve the commencement of a competitive process for the appointment to the statutory roles of Treasurer and Monitoring Officer with effect from 1 April 2022;**
  - (ii) agree that, in the interim, Helen MacArthur, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, undertakes the role of Treasurer with support from the outgoing Treasurer;**
  - (iii) note that Gareth Owens will undertake the duties of the Monitoring Officer until 31 March 2022.**

Helen MacArthur, Gareth Owens and Matt Georgiou were readmitted into the meeting.

## 17 RE-APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBERS TO SERVE ON THE AUTHORITY'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE

- 17.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the report which proposed re-appointing two independent members to the Authority's Standards Committee.
- 17.2 The Authority's Standards Committee comprises four independent members and two Members of the Authority. The terms of office of Sally Ellis and Julia Hughes will expire in December 2021; both have confirmed their willingness to be re-appointed for a second term of four years.
- 17.3 **RESOLVED to re-appoint Sally Ellis and Julia Hughes for a period of four years from 1 January 2022.**

The Chair thanked all officers for their reports and presentations at the meeting and to those who contributed to the detail of the reports.

It was then agreed to move into part II of the meeting.

The following Members and Officers were present for discussion of the part II item.

Councillors: P Lewis; D Rees; B Apsley; M Bateman; B Blakeley; M LI Davies; M Dixon; A I Dunbar; P Evans; J B Hughes; G Lowe; J W Parry; A Roberts; O Thomas; D Wisinger.

Officers: Dawn Docx; Gareth Owens; Matt Georgiou; Alwen Davies; Sandra Williams (Translator).

## PART II

### 18 CHIEF FIRE OFFICER'S SITUATIONAL ASSESSMENT

- 18.1 The Chief Fire Officer presented her report which outlined her current situational assessment of the Service. It highlighted key risks and challenges, and proposed the next steps for the Authority in terms of increasing the Service's resilience to those risks and challenges.
- 18.2 The report summarised the CFO's first 100 days; that she had met with staff and stakeholders of the Service, and was now in a position to begin addressing some of the issues raised.
- 18.3 In the short term, the issues to be addressed include the many temporary positions that are held within the Service. The starting point for this will necessarily be the principal officer team and Members agreed that a benchmarking report on principal officer salaries be commissioned with the outcome presented to the Executive Panel in October 2021. This will enable the appointments process to be completed in time for approval by Members at the next meeting of the full Authority in December 2021. The Deputy Clerk confirmed that his team would undertake the pay review in terms of the CFO's salary in order to ensure transparency and thereafter she will be involved in the pay review for the remainder of the Principal Officers' roles.
- 18.4 Members were reminded that recent Audit Wales reports had highlighted the need for the Authority to address the strategic risks facing the Service and build its resilience to address future challenges; and also the importance of involving stakeholders, engaging widely and becoming more transparent and accountable.
- 18.5 The CFO also proposed evaluating the identified risks through a series of targeted reviews, funded from reserves, which will form the basis of a legacy 'road map' for the next Fire and Rescue Authority following the May 2022 elections.

18.6 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) note the CFO's situational assessment and the current and anticipated future challenges facing NWFRS;**
- (ii) recognise that the Service will need to increase its resilience by enhancing and developing underpinning organisational structures;**
- (iii) request the CFO to initiate a programme of reviews into key critical areas, notably of on-call crew availability, training, corporate capacity, and emergency response cover;**
- (iv) agree that, in the first instance, the cost of scoping out and planning these reviews will be met from reserves;**
- (v) confirm the return to the established principal management team structure, including the ACO post and ratify the appointment of Helen MacArthur as an ACFO;**
- (vi) request an independent benchmarking review of the salaries of the principal management team prior to advertising for the vacant roles;**
- (vii) note the need for Members to form an appointments panel comprising the membership of the Executive Panel as set out in the Authority's constitution in order to make recommendations for Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer appointments at the next Fire and Rescue Authority meeting in December 2021.**