

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY
EXECUTIVE PANEL

Minutes of the **Executive Panel** of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 17 March 2025, virtually via Zoom. Meeting commenced at 14.00hrs.

Councillor

Clr Dylan Rees (Chair)
Clr Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
Clr Carol Beard
Clr Chris Hughes
Clr Rondo Roberts (left 14:57)
Clr Paul Rogers (from 14:11)
Clr Gareth Sandilands
Clr Rob Triggs
Clr Antony Wren

Representing

Ynys Môn County Council
Flintshire County Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Conwy County Borough Council
Wrexham County Council
Wrexham County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Gwynedd Council
Flintshire County Council

Also present:

Helen MacArthur
Anthony Jones
Tracey Williams
Dafydd Edwards (left 14:54)
Gareth Owens (left 14:54)
George Jones
Lisa Allington

Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Head of Corporate Communications
Treasurer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Atebol - Translator
Executive Assistant

1.0 APOLOGIES

Councillor

Clr John Ifan Jones
Clr Alan Hughes
Clr Gareth A Roberts
Dawn Docx

Representing

Anglesey County Council
Denbighshire County Council
Gwynedd County Council
Chief Fire Officer

ABSENT

Councillor

Clr Dale Selvester

Representing

Flintshire County Council

2.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2.1 The Clerk and the Treasurer declared an interest in the Part II item.

3.0 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

3.1 There was no notice of urgent matters.

4.0 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 DECEMBER 2024

4.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2024 were submitted for approval. A proposal was made that they were a true and accurate record of proceedings. This was seconded and passed with all in favour.

4.2 RESOLVED to:

- i) approve the minutes as a true and correct record of the meeting held.**

5.0 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 It was noted that the request in relation to sickness absence comparisons had now been included within the Performance Monitoring Report.

6.0 INDEPENDENT CULTURAL REVIEW INTO NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

6.1 ACFO MacArthur gave apologies that the Chief Fire Officer was unable to attend the meeting, and delivered the Independent Cultural Review into North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service) which presented to Members of the Executive Panel of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) the report of the independent cultural review into the Service, and to confirm the next steps on its cultural journey.

6.2 The Chair asked what the response had been from Welsh Government (WG) in relation to the Crest report, and ACFO MacArthur confirmed that WG felt there had been good engagement and take up within both North Wales and Mid and West Wales Fire and Rescue Service, which provided confidence in the reports presented by Crest. Importantly, it was stressed by Crest to the WG that it was very much about the ideas and beliefs of the staff, not an investigation; however, the results reflected how staff felt and should therefore be acted upon accordingly. The report also highlighted that more work was required on engaging with retained duty system (RDS) staff, along with work strengthening leadership throughout the organisation.

6.3 ACFO MacArthur advised that the Chief Fire Officer had held separate discussions with WG to explore whether support could be provided to the Authority to implement the report's recommendations. These discussions were at an early stage and ACFO MacArthur asked that Members endorse this approach.

6.4 It was noted that there had been a number of positives in the review; however, there had also been a number of negatives, and Members were reminded that the Chair had written a letter to the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) asking that the recommendations be actioned as soon as possible.

- 6.5 A Member highlighted the area of the report that mentioned strained union relationships and asked how this was being dealt with. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that six-weekly meetings were held with Union Representatives at which matters of strategic importance were discussed, along with matters concerning support for the workforce. These meetings were working very well with good engagement on both sides which allowed discussions to be held at an early stage.
- 6.6 ACFO MacArthur further confirmed that training would be delivered to Middle Leaders to address some of the concerns that they had raised within the report in relation to dealing with staff matters.
- 6.7 One Member asked how the balance of meeting diversity targets and appointing the best person for the job was managed. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that the Service's recruitment and selection processes were robust, and it was recognised as being important not to lower standards to meet diversity targets; however, more meaningful engagement was required to provide reassurance that everyone employed by the Service were first and foremost capable of carrying out the role.

6.8 RESOLVED to:

- i) Acknowledge receipt of the report of the independent cultural review;**
- ii) endorse the next steps on the cultural journey of the Service; and**
- iii) endorse ongoing communication with the Welsh Government in relation support for the implementation of the recommendations of the report.**

7.0 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT APRIL 2024 - DECEMBER 2024

- 7.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented to Members the Performance Monitoring Report April 2024 to December 2024. This report provided comparative data relating to the Authority's 'Our Five Principles for keeping communities safe' for the first three quarters of the 2024/25 financial year. The report also contained commentary on activity and proposed activity associated with the principles.
- 7.2 Members felt that there were a lot of positives in the report; however, the data in relation to automatic fire alarms remained concerning and it was asked how this was being addressed. It was also noted that there had been a further increase in fires at HMP Berwyn. ACFO Jones confirmed that the Protection teams spent a great deal of time engaging with repeat calls to educate them in reducing the number of calls received. In relation to HMP Berwyn, this was an area of local partnership working with the site, which was now at full capacity, and remained a primary task for the Wrexham station Commander.

7.3 The Chair advised Members that he had recently attended Llangefni fire station whereby the crew had noted that the fire hydrant required for use whilst tackling a fire had not been working effectively. The Chair queried what checks were in place to ensure that hydrants were in working order, and ACFO Jones confirmed that there were staff dedicated to working with the water boards to maintain the fire hydrants across North Wales, but that this was an area that was under constant review to strengthen the processes. ACFO Millington further noted that the water boards tended to lower the water pressures within the systems when experiencing water loss, and that it was possible to request that they increase the pressure when required. One member queried why the water boards were not responsible for ensuring that hydrants were in working order and ACFO Jones responded that the hydrants were owned by the Service, and it was a statutory duty that the Service maintain this equipment.

7.4 One Member highlighted the sickness absence levels and asked what measures were being put in place to reduce these numbers. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that an Employee Assistance Programme was in place for staff to access which provided self-help tips in relation to improving physical and mental health. Staff networks were also well established which provided regular activities for staff to get together and focus on their own wellbeing. Protected gym time was offered to operational staff along with dedicated weekly periods of time for corporate staff to carry out exercise. Lines of communication were kept open with absent members of staff to maintain engagement, and modifications to an individual's working practices were offered where appropriate in order to support them in returning to the workplace. However, it was to be noted that NHS waiting times were lengthy and some absences were unavoidable. This remained a difficult area to manage.

7.5 **RESOLVED to:**

i) note the content of the performance monitoring report.

8.0 COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2025/26

8.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented the Community Risk Management Implementation Plan 2025/26, the purpose of which was to provide an overview of the feedback received from the public consultation on the Community Risk Management Implementation Plan (CRMIP) 2025-2026, and the associated Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA), and to seek approval of the final version of the aforementioned documents.

8.2 The Chair gave thanks to the Team for the high quality of this report.

8.3 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the content of the feedback report; and**
- ii) endorse the attached CRMIP 2025-26 and associated EqIA for publication.**

9.0 THE SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP DUTY – ANNUAL REPORT

9.1 ACFO Anthony Jones presented the Social Partnership Duty Annual Report which sought approval for the submission of the first Annual Social Partnership Duty Report to the Social Partnership Council for scrutiny and to publish the report on the Authority's website.

9.2 The Chair advised Members that he had requested progress with the Emergency Cover Review be accelerated to improve cover in the more rural areas, and ACFO Jones confirmed that work continued in this area and that the development of a collective agreement looked positive.

9.? RESOLVED to:

- i) Approve the Annual Social Partnership Duty Report for submission to the Social Partnership Council for scrutiny and publication on the Authority's website.**

10.0 URGENT MATTERS

10.1 The Chair advised Members that a meeting had taken place with Chiefs, Chairs and the Cabinet Secretary on the morning of 17 March, and that she would be making an oral statement to the Senedd on 25 March in relation to the culture review and how she expected to move things forward.

10.2 ACFO MacArthur advised that Members had been issued with a link to complete an electronic declaration of interest form and asked that they ensure this be completed as soon as possible, and at the latest by the end of March, as this was a requirement of the annual audit.

PART II

11 APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER AND TREASURER

11.1 The Clerk and the Treasurer left the meeting at this stage and ACFO Helen MacArthur delivered the Appointment of Monitoring Officer and Treasurer paper, a Part II item which advised Members on the requirements of the statutory posts of Monitoring Officer and Treasurer and sought approval to extend the current appointments to 31 March 2027.

11.2 Members were impressed with the way in which the Clerk and the Treasurer fulfilled their duties but asked how they could be satisfied of value for money. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that expectations were put in place upon appointment and that there were measures to ensure that these were being properly met. It was suggested that some form of performance review be put into place; however, Members felt that this was not necessary as they were satisfied that the feedback provided by ACFO MacArthur demonstrated that they were fulfilling their roles fully.

11.3 RESOLVED to:

- i) note the requirement for the Authority to appoint to the statutory roles of Treasurer and Monitoring Officer; and**
- ii) endorse the recommendation to extend the current arrangements to 31 March 2027.**

Meeting closed: 15:00 hrs