

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of **North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority** held on **Monday 28 April 2025** virtually via **Zoom**. Meeting commenced at **09.30**.

Councillor

Dylan Rees (Chair)
Paul Cunningham (Deputy Chair)
Bryan Apsley
Marion Bateman
Carol Beard
Tina Claydon
Ann Davies
Adele Davies-Cooke
Sharon Doleman
Jeff Evans
Alan Hughes
Chris Hughes
John Brynmor Hughes (left 10:57)
Gareth R Jones
Marc Jones
Gwynfor Owen
Beverley Parry-Jones (left 11:25)
Arwyn Herald Roberts
Austin Roberts
Gareth A Roberts
Rondo Roberts
Paul Rogers
Gareth Sandilands
Dale Selvester
Antony Wren
Mark Young

Representing

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

Also present:

Dawn Docx
Helen MacArthur
Stuart Millington
Justin Evans
Anthony Jones
Dafydd Edwards
Gareth Owens
Matthew Powell
Elgan Roberts
Steve Morris
Rhian Williams
George Jones
Lisa Allington

Chief Fire Officer (CFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO)
Treasurer
Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Deputy Clerk and Monitoring Officer
Head of Finance and Procurement
Head of ICT
Deputy Head of Corporate Communications
Atebol Translation Services
Members' Services

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

John Ifan Jones

Representing

Anglesey County Council

ABSENT

Councillor

Rob Triggs

Representing

Gwynedd Council

The above apologies were offered and accepted.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- 2.1 The Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Treasurer all declared an interest in Item 21 and confirmed that they would be leaving the meeting before that paper was discussed.

3 NOTICE OF URGENT MATTERS

- 3.1 No notice of urgent matters had been received.

4 MINUTES OF THE FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON 20 JANUARY 2025

- 4.1 The minutes of the North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority (the Authority) meeting held on 20 January 2025 were submitted for approval.

4.2 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **approve the FRA minutes from 20 January 2025 as a true and correct record of the meeting held.**

5 MATTERS ARISING

- 5.1 It was noted that in relation to paragraph 5.1 of the minutes, the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's review into Firefighting Techniques, this review had now been completed and was in its final draft. The report would be brought to the next Authority meeting in July. Members were advised that recommendations in the report were already being acted upon.

- 5.2 In relation to paragraph 5.3, Members were advised that ACFO Stuart Millington had decided to retire and would be leaving at the end of June. DCFO Stewart Forshaw had also decided to resubmit his retirement notice and would be leaving at the end of the month. Thanks were given to both officers for their tireless work over their many years of service and for their considerable contribution to the work of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service). This sentiment was echoed by the Chair and Members.

- 5.3 Cllr Doleman asked for her personal thanks as the Authority's Equality and Diversity (EDI) Champion to be passed to DCFO Forshaw for the dedication that he had put into equality and diversity across the Service. His contribution had been considerable and had made a huge difference to EDI across the Service.
- 5.4 The Chair confirmed that he had attended the funeral of Brian Gorling.

6 CHAIR'S REPORT

- 6.1 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 January and March 2025.

6.2 RESOLVED to:

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

7 EMERGENCY COVER REVIEW

- 7.1 ACFO Jones presented the Emergency Cover Review paper which provided Members with an update on the work of the Emergency Cover Review (ECR) Task and Finish subgroup. This was set up in response to the recommendation from the 20 January 2025 meeting for officers to continue to devise and test alternative solutions with representative bodies, within the agreed budget, to address emergency cover in rural locations.
- 7.2 ACFO Jones confirmed that the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) had committed to signing a collective agreement and that this had now been signed off by Ben Selby at an executive level.
- 7.3 The hard work and commitment shown by members of the ECR group, particularly Terry Ledden and Rebekah Uden of the FBU and Nick Roberts and Tom Weston as Chair and Deputy Chair of the ECR Working Group, was acknowledged and both ACFO Jones and Members asked that their thanks be passed on. The Chair and the CFO also gave thanks to those involved in this very long and measured process and congratulated them for reaching a collective agreement.
- 7.4 It was asked how this would reduce the identified risk in terms of day cover in rural areas and ACFO Jones clarified that the aim of the collective agreement was to make the existing wholtime stations self-resilient, i.e. realigning their own absence cover, start and finish times and annual leave etc., which would release some of the funds from the establishment budget in order to deliver a more efficient and effective service in partnership with the on-call cohort in the more rural areas. This would be evaluated on a quarterly basis over the next couple of years.

- 7.5 The CFO further asked that it be noted that this was not a move to a day-staffing model but rather a shift to nucleus crewing where the wholetime firefighters form a crew with the retained firefighters in that area.
- 7.6 A Member highlighted that this subject had been debated for a long time and as such, queried whether the implementation date of January 2026 was soon enough as the risks required addressing as soon as possible. The CFO responded that some funding from the Service's transformational reserves would be used to implement the pilot on stations by the beginning of September 2025. However, recognising that it might take some time to release the funding, some reserves would be allocated to test and implement the pilot of nucleus crewing by Summer 2025.
- 7.7 The Clerk further noted that it had taken some time for a resolution to the ECR issue to be achieved and that it would likely take some time to implement solutions to such a complex issue.
- 7.8 The Chair queried why it had been decided not to pursue piloting eleven-hour shift patterns and the CFO responded that the Service was mindful of the recommendations of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor with regards to mitigating the risk of fatigue in firefighters. However, it had been decided to address this separately to the ECR and this would be returned to in the near future.
- 7.9 A Member noted that the Service's relationship with the FBU had been transformational and there was clear evidence of collaborative working for a better future for the Service, both in relation to the ECR and the Training Centre project. Congratulations were given to Officers for this change in the Service's relationship with the FBU.
- 7.10 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Note that officers have continued to work with representative bodies in social partnership to develop a way forward with the ECR;**
 - ii) **note that progress has been made in the drafting of a Collective Agreement with it being agreed in principle by the Fire Brigades Union at a meeting of the Joint Consultation and Negotiation Committee on 4 April 2025;**
 - iii) **appreciate the continued efforts of all parties to progress a solution and introduce a pilot to demonstrate the self-sufficiency of the staffing levels at the current wholetime fire stations; and**
 - iv) **Acknowledge that by demonstrating this self-sufficiency that there is scope to introduce pilots to utilise posts from the remaining establishment to provide a more efficient and effective emergency cover model across the whole of North Wales.**

8 TRAINING CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE

- 8.1 ACFO Evans delivered the Training Centre Project Update, a strategic update on the progress of North Wales Fire and Rescue Service (the Service)'s Training Centre project, incorporating recent developments from the April business case workshops, updated risk position, revised timeline, and current focus areas.
- 8.2 The Chair thanked Cllr Sandilands for his contribution as Training Centre Champion. Cllr Sandilands outlined the key outcomes for the training centre project and noted that he was committed to working towards futureproofing the Service and delivering an outstanding training centre on time and within budget to deliver first class training for the Service's firefighters. This sentiment was echoed by Members.
- 8.3 The Treasurer advised that Members be aware of the considerable financial commitment to this project and that Welsh Government grant funding should be pursued to fund as much of the project as possible, especially bearing in mind the recommendations of the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor.
- 8.4 A Member asked whether there was a danger that the Welsh Government might not provide funding if the project was progressed as they may see this as an indication that it could be delivered without external funding. ACFO MacArthur responded that the work being carried out currently was to move the project to the next gateway, building up the design and developing the costings and funding models. This included seeking all available resources from the Welsh Government.
- 8.5 Cllr Gareth Jones asked that his reluctance to progress the project without Welsh Government funding be noted, and Cllr Sandilands responded that delaying the project would result in further financial cost to the Service in relation to project slippage and inflation, but that he agreed that most of the funding needed to come from partners rather than local authorities.
- 8.6 A Member advised that the Welsh Government preferred a preprepared project that was ready to build before committing to funding and so pushing ahead with this stage of the project was important.
- 8.7 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Note the revised critical path and target for RIBA Gateway 4 completion (April 2027);**
 - ii) **note progress in defining scope, specification, and delivery model through business case workshops;**
 - iii) **note the key risks identified on the project risk register and the measures in place to mitigate them; and**
 - iv) **note the strategic alignment of the new Training Centre with broader service community risk management and well-being goals.**

9 INDEPENDENT CULTURAL REVIEW INTO NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

- 9.1 CFO Docx presented to Members the report of the independent cultural review into the Service and confirmed the next steps on the cultural journey of the Service.
- 9.2 CFO Docx emphasised that the Welsh Government were keen to work with and support the Service, both with financial input and expertise and that a meeting was due to take place to work out what that package might look like.

9.3 RESOLVED to:

- i) Acknowledge receipt of the report of the independent cultural review; and**
- ii) approve the request for financial or “in kind” support from Welsh Government to continue the cultural journey of the Service.**

10 APPOINTMENT PROCESS FOR THE POST OF ASSISTANT CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

- 10.1 The Clerk advised Members of the arrangements for the recruitment to one of the two vacant Assistant Chief Fire Officer (ACFO) posts.
- 10.2 It was clarified that appointment to the Service Leadership Team was the responsibility of the Authority and so an Appointment Committee needed to be established. In line with the Constitution, the Appointment Committee required a membership of six Executive Panel members and those eligible were asked to express their interest outside of the meeting.
- 10.3 Members noted that it was important to ensure that there was a diversity balance between members of the panel.

10.4 RESOLVED to:

- i) Note the process as outlined within the paper;**
- ii) confirm the membership of the appointments committee; and**
- iii) take appropriate steps to ensure that there is a diversity balance on the appointment panel.**

11 PROVISIONAL OUTTURN 2024/25

- 11.1 Elgan Roberts, Head of Finance, presented to Members an update on the revenue and capital expenditure forecast for 2024/25, as of 31 March 2025.

11.2 The Treasurer gave his thanks to Elgan for the work put into the paper and noted that there much of the information was already known to the Authority. He also highlighted that the Court of Appeal had found in favour of the public sector in relation to Firelink and so this was no longer a financial risk.

11.3 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **note the draft revenue and capital outturn projections for the 2024/25 financial year as detailed within the report;**
- ii) **note the risks associated with inflation, tariffs, and supply chain issues; and**
- iii) **approve the movement to/from earmarked and general fund reserves.**

12 **BUDGET CONFIRMATION FOR 2025/26**

12.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the Budget Confirmation for 2025/26, the purpose of which was to update Members of the final revenue and capital budget for the financial year 2025/26.

12.2 It was asked how the forecast of 3.2% for the pay award would be managed internally. ACFO MacArthur clarified that the Service was carrying several vacancies which it did not intend to fill within this financial year, and this would enable the cost to be absorbed. A Member queried whether this meant that we would enter the next financial year with a cost pressure for filling these vacancies and ACFO MacArthur confirmed that it did; however, the pay budget was one of the areas scrutinised closely by the Budget Scrutiny Working Group and this would be picked up by them.

12.3 The Chair of the Budget scrutiny Working Group gave assurances as to the level of scrutiny given to the budget and thanked all those involved for their hard work.

12.4 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Approve the final Revenue Budget of £52.389 million;**
- ii) **approve the utilisation of reserves totalling £0.601 million;**
- iii) **approve Capital Funding of £6.103 million for the financial year 2025/26;**
- iv) **approve the utilisation of reserves to cover development costs of approximately £2.100 million for the training centre in the year; and**
- v) **note the potential impacts from global supply chain issues, tariffs, and increasing prices, which may affect future financial planning.**

13 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY (TMS) 2025-26

13.1 The Treasurer presented the Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) 2025-26 which set out for Members the proposed Treasury Management Strategy for the period April 2025 – March 2026.

13.2 He further highlighted key figures within the report of £36m authorised limit, £33m operational boundary and £3m minimum revenue provision.

13.3 A Member asked what the percentage was in relation to new funding and refinancing existing loans. The Treasurer responded that this was detailed in Table 1 of the paper.

13.4 **RESOLVED to:**

i) Approve the Treasury Management Strategy for 2025/26.

14 PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2025/26

14.1 ACFO MacArthur delivered the Pay Policy Statement 2025/26 which informed Members of their responsibilities arising from the Localism Act 2011 (the Act). Key areas of the paper were highlighted.

14.2 **RESOLVED to:**

i) Note the requirements of the Localism Act 2011; and

ii) approve the capital funding and allocation process.

15 COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2025/26

15.1 ACFO Jones presented the Community Risk Management Implementation Plan 2025/26 to Members. This provided 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 sought approval of the final version of the aforementioned documents.

15.2 Thanks were given to the officers involved in producing this paper and it was noted that it had already been endorsed by the Executive Panel.

15.3 **RESOLVED to:**

i) Note the content of the feedback report; and

ii) endorse the attached CRMIP 2025-26 and associated EqIA for publication.

16 STANDARDS COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

16.1 The Deputy Clerk presented the annual report of the Standards Committee (the Committee) to Members which summarised the work carried out by the Committee between 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

16.2 **RESOLVED to:**

i) **note the Annual Report.**

17 FIREFIGHTERS PENSION SCHEMES LOCAL PENSION BOARD – TERMS OF REFERENCE

17.1 ACFO MacArthur delivered the Firefighters Pension Schemes Local Pension Board Terms of Reference paper to Members which sought approval for the Terms of Reference of the Local Pension Board (LPB) for the 2025/26 financial year. Key areas of the Terms of Reference were highlighted.

17.2 The Treasurer advised that the membership quorum of the LPB had been a concern, and these changes would ensure that the required business could be undertaken.

17.3 A Member asked if there were any plans to move away from non-ethical investments and ACFO MacArthur responded that there were no underlying investments for the Firefighters Pension Scheme, although there was a liability. However, the underlying investments were looked at for the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) as this scheme was asset backed.

17.4 The Treasurer further clarified that Flintshire County Council had their own pension board which was responsible for the local government pension scheme, and it was they who influenced and scrutinised the investments.

17.5 **RESOLVED to:**

- i) **Note the scope and requirements of the Terms of Reference of the Local Pension Board;**
- ii) **note the recommendation of the Local Pension Board to amend the quorum; and**
- iii) **approve the Terms of Reference of the Local Pension Board for the 2025/26 financial year.**

18 FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEME – UPDATE ON LEGAL CHALLENGES

18.1 ACFO MacArthur advised Members that the purpose of the Firefighters' Pension Scheme paper was to update them on the statutory changes to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme following significant legal challenges. These were more commonly known as the McCloud and O'Brien (Matthews 2) pension remedy exercises. The detail of the paper was summarised.

- 18.2 It was highlighted that a report had been made to the Pensions Regulator as the Service had been unable to achieve the statutory requirements.
- 18.3 A Member asked whether the financial risk in relation to these legal challenges belonged to the Authority, and ACFO MacArthur confirmed that it did.
- 18.4 It was also asked whether the Service had the capacity to cope with these challenges and ACFO MacArthur responded that there were currently no staff available nationally to bring in to support the Service's pensions team and so they were coping with the workload as best as they were able.
- 18.5 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Note the progress with implementing the McCloud Judgment;**
 - ii) **note that a report has been made to the Pensions Regulator as the Service has been unable to achieve the statutory requirements; and**
 - iii) **note the position regarding the implementation of the O'Brien Judgment.**

19 CONTRACT PROCEDURE RULES SUMMARY 2025

- 19.1 The Head of Finance, Elgan Roberts, presented the Contract Procedure Rules Summary 2025 to Members, the purpose of which was to present the proposed changes to the Contract Procedure Rules (CPR) of the Authority, following amendments to align with the Procurement Act 2023, implemented on 24 February 2025.
- 19.2 Members were advised that the paper had previously been to Audit Committee, and they had recommended approval.
- 19.3 **RESOLVED to:**
- i) **Approve the Contract Procedure Rules.**

20 THE SOCIAL PARTNERSHIP DUTY – ANNUAL REPORT

- 20.1 ACFO Jones delivered 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.
- 20.2 Members were advised that the paper had previously been to Executive Panel, and they had recommended approval.
- 20.3 Members asked for their thanks to be passed on to Area Manager Sandra Williams who was retiring at the end of the month.

20.4 **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.**

21 **APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING OFFICER AND TREASURER**

21.1 The Clerk, Deputy Clerk and Treasurer all left the meeting in line with their declaration of interest.

21.2 CFO Docx 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.

21.3 This matter had been considered by the Executive Panel at its meeting of 17 March 2025. Following discussion and assurances on the performance of the existing arrangements, the Executive Panel endorsed the recommendation to extend the contracts for both the Monitoring Officer and S151 officer to the 31 March 2027.

21.4 A Member asked where the Authority stood should something happen to the Treasurer, being an individual rather than an organisation. ACFO MacArthur confirmed that either herself or the Head of Finance would pick up the role in the interim as they were both suitably qualified.

21.5 **RESOLVED to:**

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

URGENT MATTERS

22.1 There were no urgent matters to consider.

Members and Officers were thanked for their participation.

Meeting closed: 11:29