

NORTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

Minutes of the meeting of North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority held on Monday 21 June 2021 virtually via Zoom. Meeting commenced at 10.15am.

Councillor

P R Lewis (Chair)
D Rees
S Lloyd-Williams
R E Parry
N Smith
A Tansley
B Blakeley
A Davies
M Ll Davies
M Bateman
A I Dunbar
P Shotton
D Wisinger
S Glyn
J B Hughes
J W Parry
G A Roberts
G Williams
B Apsley
M Dixon
G Lowe
B Parry-Jones
A Roberts

Representing

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

Also present:

S A Smith (Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive); C P Everett (Clerk and Monitoring Officer to the Authority); K W Finch (Treasurer to the Authority); 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); G Williams (Accountant, Treasurer's Department, Conwy County Borough Council); A Davies (Member Liaison Officer).

1 APOLOGIES

Councillor

P Evans
V Gay
W O Thomas

Representing

Denbighshire County Council
Flintshire County Council
Flintshire County 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 15 MARCH 2021

4.1 The minutes of the Fire and Rescue Authority meeting held on 15 March 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 his attendance at meetings since March.

6.2 All meetings had been held virtually, including regular meetings with the CFO and Deputy Chair, NJC pay briefing and Regional Leadership Board meetings.

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

7 COVID-19 UPDATE

7.1 The Chief Fire Officer gave Members an update about COVID-19 related activities and the latest situation within the Service.

7.2 It was noted that the effects of COVID-19 on the Service itself had been low. The Service is continuing its process of both recovery and preparation of new ways of working in the future.

7.3 Staff are continuing to undertake lateral flow testing which involves a combination of workplace and home testing.

7.4 **RESOLVED to note the update.**

8 PERFORMANCE MONITORING APRIL 2020 – MARCH 2021

- 8.1 ACO Morris presented the report which provided information about the Service's activity and performance against improvement objectives during the financial year 2020/21.
- 8.2 Between April 2020 and March 2021 the Service attended a combined total of 4,698 emergency incidents and false alarms – 3.6% fewer than in the previous financial year.
- 8.3 Notwithstanding the pandemic restrictions, the Service had completed 11,334 Safe and Well Checks during the year, including 4,382 to households identified as being at high risk from fire. Although it was noted that the number completed was lower than planned, the Service continued to target its activity towards those in greatest need; 34.5% (3,908) of the completed Checks originated from referrals made to the Service by other agencies under partnership agreements designed to help identify more vulnerable households. However, despite best endeavours to target those considered to be most at risk of a dwelling fire, the number of these types of fires attended where there was no smoke alarm fitted increased from 43 in 2019/20 to 51 in 2020/21.
- 8.4 In response to a member's question about the types of dwellings with no smoke alarm, ACO Morris explained that analysis is undertaken but due to the very small numbers involved it was difficult to identify any specific patterns or trends.
- 8.5 Members were pleased that the Service had continued to undertake safe and well checks and noted that new ways of working had been developed to deliver these checks. Cllr M LI Davies also commented that Authority Members had a duty to promote these safe and well checks to the public at every opportunity.
- 8.6 **RESOLVED to note the contents of the performance monitoring report.**

9 AUDIT PLAN 2021

- 9.1 The audit plan for 2021 was presented to Members for information. Matthew Edwards from Audit Wales was in attendance at the meeting and presented the plan to Members.
- 9.2 The estimated fee noted in the audit plan was £61,264. However, should additional work be identified as being necessary, there may be an additional fee.
- 9.3 It was noted that there is an increase in the fee due to the need to undertake additional work following the revaluation of the Authority's properties.

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

During the next agenda item, the Clerk left the meeting.

10 DRAFT STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2020/21

10.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the draft 2020/21 Statement of Accounts to Members and requested delegation of the approval of the final audited version to the Executive Panel at its meeting on 26 July 2021.

10.2 In terms of the outturn position at year end, it was noted that there was an underspend of £0.06m in the revenue budget. Due to COVID-19, the capital plan had been deferred to 2021/22. The Authority continues to maintain earmarked reserves to provide financial contingency for future events or risks and as at 31 March 2021 a total of £3.46m was held in earmarked reserves.

10.3 It was noted that although the pandemic had created an overspend in some budget headings such as buildings, supplies and ICT, other areas had experienced an underspend which offset the overspend. The main area of underspend related to payroll costs due to vacancies that had not been filled due to Covid-19 restrictions. The Authority had also been able to claim funding from the Welsh Government's Covid-19 Hardship Fund during the first half of 2020/21.

10.4 Cllr Apsley thanked ACFO MacArthur and the Finance team, at NWFRS and CCBC, for all the work undertaken during the year and for the reports and assurance provided to the Audit Committee.

10.5 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) note the draft revenue and capital outturn positions as detailed within the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts;**
- (ii) delegate approval of the final audited 2020/21 Statement of Accounts to the Executive Panel, at its meeting on 26 July 2021;**
- (iii) approve the earmarked reserves; and**
- (iv) note that no bad debts have been written off in 2020/21.**

11 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2020/21

11.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2020/21. The document had previously been reviewed by the Executive Panel at its meeting of 10 May 2021 and Members had recommended approval by the Authority.

11.2 The Annual Governance Statement will be published as part of the production of the statutory financial statements for 2020/21. The forward work programme for 2021/22 was contained within the draft Annual Government Statement. It was noted that an assessment will be made by the external auditor to confirm that it is consistent with the financial statements and has been produced in line with the Framework.

11.3 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) note the governance arrangements outlined within the draft 2020/21 Annual Governance Statement;**
- (ii) note the forward work plan for 2021/22; and**
- (iii) approve the draft 2020/21 Annual Government Statement.**

12 TREASURY MANAGEMENT ACTIVITY AND ACTUAL PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS FOR 2020/2021

12.1 Graham Williams from CCBC led Members through the report which contained details of the Authority's borrowing position and final prudential indicators for the 2020/21 financial year.

12.2 It was noted that the outstanding borrowing as at 31 March 2021 was £26.1m and all loans were fixed term in nature. The report confirmed that the borrowing and investments were within the prudential limits set by the Authority.

12.3 It was noted that the report had been presented to the Audit Committee and members had recommended that it be approved by the Authority.

12.3 **RESOLVED to**

- (i) note the outstanding borrowing as at 31 March 2021; and**
- (ii) approve the final prudential indicators for 2020/21.**

13 LEGAL CHALLENGE TO THE 2015 PENSION REFORMS

13.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the report which provided an update on the legal challenge to the implementation of the firefighter pension scheme reforms which were effected in 2015. It was noted that the Local Pension Board received an update on this matter during its meeting on 21 April 2021.

- 13.2 Members were reminded that following the lengthy legal process regarding age discrimination in the public sector pension reforms, the Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the claimants and the judgment was issued on the 18 December 2018. This confirmed that the age discrimination inherent within the 2015 pension reforms had not been justified. The case is referred to as the McCloud/Sargeant Judgment (the Judgment).
- 13.3 The ACFO explained the background and the complexity of the case which means that the remedy won't be completed until around October 2023. Changes to legislation are required and some members due to retire prior to legislative arrangements being finalised are considered to be at an immediate detriment. However, until the detailed planning documents are provided it is not considered feasible to calculate their benefits due to the technical uncertainties.
- 13.4 It was noted that the legal advisors for the UK fire and rescue authorities recognise the difficulties being experienced across the sector. They are seeking to agree an approach with the FBU which would enable immediate detriment cases to be dealt with swiftly, fairly and in a consistent manner.
- 13.5 **RESOLVED to**
- (i) note the background to the McCloud/ Sargeant Judgment;**
 - (ii) note the current position with regards to remedy; and**
 - (iii) approve the recommendation that immediate detriment cases are not progressed pending further guidance from legal advisors or the receipt of national guidance.**
- 14 MODERN SLAVERY STATEMENT 2020/21
- 14.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the 2020/21 Modern Slavery Statement for North Wales Fire and Rescue Authority.
- 14.2 It was noted that this was the Authority's first Modern Slavery Statement and sets out arrangements for the 2020/21 financial year. It confirms the Authority's commitment to ensure it does not actively encourage nor support slavery or human trafficking.
- 14.3 **RESOLVED to approve the 2020/21 Modern Slavery Statement and note the actions taken.**
- 15 FIREFIGHTERS PENSION SCHEMES LOCAL PENSION BOARD – ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21
- 15.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the annual report of the Local Pension Board which details the work of the board during the 2020/21 financial year.

- 15.2 The annual report of the Local Pension Board details the work undertaken by the board during 2020/21 and provides a work programme for 2021/22. The Local Pension Board had considered the annual report at its meeting on 21 April.
- 15.3 Cllr Apsley thanked all those involved for their support while he was the Chair of the Board and complimented the excellent training sessions delivered by the Pensions Manager at meetings.
- 15.4 **RESOLVED to approve the Local Pension Board annual report 2020/21 for publication on the Authority's website.**
- 16 FIREFIGHTERS' PENSION SCHEMES LOCAL PENSION BOARD – TERMS OF REFERENCE
- 16.1 ACFO MacArthur presented the terms of reference for the Local Pension Board covering the 2021/22 financial year. The proposed terms of reference were considered by the Local Pension Board at its meeting of 21 April 2021. The Board recommended approval by the Authority.
- 16.2 It was noted that the Scheme Advisory Board had reviewed the terms of reference for each local pension boards across Wales and were satisfied with the content.
- 16.3 **RESOLVED to approve the revised Terms of Reference of the Local Pension Board for 2021/22, prior to publication on the Authority's website.**
- 17 URGENT MATTERS
- 17.1 At this juncture, the Chair referred to the Chief Fire Officer's imminent retirement. Members, named below, on behalf of their local authorities paid tribute to the Chief Fire Officer for over twenty years' loyal service to North Wales and a total of 43 years to the fire service across the UK.
- Cllr Peter Lewis, Conwy County Borough Council
 - Cllr Meirick Lloyd Davies, Denbighshire County Council
 - Cllr Ian Dunbar, Flintshire County Council
 - Cllr John Brynmor Hughes, Gwynedd Council
 - Cllr Geoff Lowe, Wrexham County Borough Council
 - Cllr Dylan Rees, Ynys Môn County Council
- 17.2 The Chair, on behalf of all those present, congratulated the Chief Fire Officer on his long service and wished him a happy and healthy retirement.

PART II

No matters.