

SOUTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

MINUTES OF THE FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 8 FEBRUARY 2021 AT 1030 HOURS VIA STARLEAF

42. PRESENT:

Councillor	Arrived	Left	Authority
D T Davies (Chair)			Caerphilly
S Bradwick			Rhondda Cynon Taf
D Ali			Cardiff
L Brown			Monmouthshire
M Colbran			Merthyr Tydfil
P Drake			Vale of Glamorgan
S Evans			Torfaen
A Hussey			Caerphilly
C Elsbury		1100hrs	Caerphilly
D Naughton			Cardiff
A Lister			Cardiff
J Williams			Cardiff
A Roberts			Rhondda Cynon Taf
V Smith			Monmouthshire
M Spencer			Newport
H Thomas			Newport
D White		1100hrs	Bridgend
R Shaw			Bridgend
G Holmes			Rhondda Cynon Taf
A Jones			Torfaen

APOLOGIES:

J Harries			Rhondda Cynon Taf
H Jarvie			Vale of Glamorgan

ABSENT

W.Hodgins			Blaenau Gwent
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OFFICERS PRESENT: CFO H Jakeway; DCO S Chapman – Monitoring Officer; Mr C Barton – Treasurer; ACO A Reed – Director of People Services; ACFO R Prendergast – Director Technical Services; ACFO Dewi Rose – Director Service Delivery, G Thomas, Head of Finance & Procurement; Sarah Watkins – Head of Corporate Support; Mr S Frank - Wales Audit

43. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Each Member declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in each agenda item which affected their Authority.

The Deputy Chief Officer confirmed that a general declaration is always made in respect of items that impact Members' home authorities as they can only be a Fire Authority member by virtue of being a local authority member.

44. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

National Agreement

The Chair referred to the recent correspondence sent to Members from the Chief Fire Officer in relation to National Employers and FBU discussions and their inability to reach agreement. Members noted the correspondence, there were no questions from Members.

Meeting with Deputy Minister – Thursday 21st January 2021

The Chief Fire Officer provided an update to Members from the meeting held with the Deputy Minister on 21 January 2021. The Chief Fire Officer advised that topics of discussion were Covid, Broadening the Role, Building Safety and Budget 2021/22.

- **Covid Pandemic**

The Chief Fire Officer advised that the good work being undertaken by volunteers to the ambulance service was highlighted to the Deputy Minister, noting that over 380 shifts have been completed. He confirmed that all volunteers with the ambulance service have received vaccinations and are receiving regular testing. He also advised that conversations are ongoing with Welsh Government in relation to the mass vaccination programme and any assistance the Service can provide. A request had been received to assist Aneurin Bevan Health Board with Track, Test, Protect, but this is no longer required.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the Chair and Deputy Chair wrote to the Deputy Minister prior to Christmas requesting that fire and rescue service staff be included within the vaccination and lateral flow testing programme, and that management are in conversation with Welsh Government in relation to enhanced health surveillance for all staff.

- **Broadening the Role**

The Chief Fire Officer advised that Members will be aware of the Deputy Minister's ambition to expand the fire and rescue services' role formally to encompass a wider range of tasks, in particular to support the NHS. He confirmed that conversations are progressing well, and advised that Assistant Chief Fire Officer Dewi Rose is the Service representative on the Broadening

the Firefighter Role Task and Finish Group who are considering the three broad areas of Emergency Medical Response, non-injured fallers and extending home fire safety checks to include other domestic hazards particularly tripping and falling.

- **Building Safety**

The Chief Fire Officer advised that as a result of the tragic events at Grenfell the UK and Welsh governments intend to reinforce legislation around building safety. He advised that Welsh Government have issued a White Paper in relation to Building Safety. He confirmed that the White Paper is being considered by the specialist team within Business Fire Safety, who will report back to management detailing the impacts this will have for the Service.

Councillor Holmes commented that he feels the White Paper will have lots of repercussions for the Service and requested that an update be provided to Members when appropriate.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that a briefing will be provided to Members at a later stage of the consultation, adding that a meeting is being held with management and the Head of Business Fire Safety this week to discuss. He confirmed an impact assessment will be provided to Welsh Government, also the fire and rescue services will be represented at the Local Government Committee hearing to present views.

- **Budget 2021/22**

The Chief Fire Officer advised of recent correspondence received from the Deputy Minister to the Chair advising that the Welsh Government grant for 2020/21 will be cash flat.

Audit Wales

The Chair welcomed Mr Steve Franks to the meeting. He also advised that Alison Butler who has been the Authority's appointed Audit Wales financial auditor for a number of years has come to the end of her placement with the Fire Authority and would be rotating to a different public sector organisation. He thanked Alison for her work with us over the years.

45. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the Fire & Rescue Authority held on 14 December 2020 were received and accepted as a true record.

The minutes of the Finance, Asset & Performance Management Scrutiny Group held 12 October 2020 were received and accepted as a true record, subject to a minor typographical error on 5th paragraph of agenda item 10.

The minutes of the Local Pension Board held 19 October 2020 were received and accepted as a true record.

The minutes of the Standards Committee held 3 February 2020 were received and accepted as a true record.

46. UPDATE ON ACTIONS

The Deputy Chief Officer advised that all outstanding actions had been completed.

RESOLVED THAT:

Members noted the update on actions.

47. REPORTS FOR DECISION

47.1 AUDIT WALES CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE – AUDIT OF ASSESSMENT OF SOUTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY'S 2019/20 PERFORMANCE

The Auditor was pleased to confirm that Audit Wales has completed its review of the audit of assessment of the Authority's performance of 2019/20 and the Authority has been awarded the Audit Wales Certificate of Compliance.

RESOLVED THAT:

Members accepted the Audit Wales Certificate of Compliance.

47.2 AUDIT WALES ANNUAL REPORT LETTER 2019/20

The Treasurer presented the Audit Wales Annual Audit Letter which details the conclusions of Audit Wales review of the Authority's financial reporting for 2019/20. He was pleased to confirm the Auditor General had once again issued an unqualified audit opinion on the Authority's accounting statements in relation to its financial transactions.

Councillor Shaw commended the Service on another unqualified audit and complimented staff for their record keeping, policies and procedures. The Chair reiterated Councillor Shaw's comments adding that the Authority has seen unqualified reports for nine years running, for which he is immensely proud.

Councillor Smith queried why the Authority were required to pay the additional fee for actuarial revaluation reports, adding that she was of the opinion funding is the responsibility of Welsh Government.

The Treasurer advised that Councillor Smith is partly right, confirming that pension costs are met by Welsh Government but the actual costs of accounting and running the schemes sits with the Authority.

The Treasurer wished to draw Members attention to the wording under 'financial audit fee' that states the final accounts audit fee is above the estimated fee set out in the Annual Audit Plan due to significantly more resources required to deliver. He wished to allay any concerns Members may have in relation to any significant issues arising in the audit, confirming that there were no major issues with the accounts themselves.

RESOLVED THAT:

Members accepted the Annual Audit Letter of Audit Wales.

47.3 REVENUE BUDGET 2021/22 AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Treasurer presented the report on the Revenue Budget 2021/22 and Capital Programme, including outstanding matters in respect of revenue budget, feedback on the consultation exercise undertaken and recommendation on the level of the contributions budget for 2021/22 together with the associated capital programme planned for future years.

He drew Members attention to the population data within, noting that the two biggest changes were in respect of Newport with a 2.4% increase and Cardiff with a 1.34% decrease.

The Treasurer advised that a significant element of the budget relates to pay. Although the Chancellor announced pay constraints for public sector, it was felt there were associated risks within the fire and rescue service for such constraints, particularly in relation to blue light responders and pay demands for increases that will be received from representative bodies, so it was decided to include provision for a pay increase. He further advised that if a material pay increase does not occur he is seeking the agreement from Members for delegation to allow him to reduce the contributions budget for next year and to make such calculations as may be necessary and to adjust/refund constituent council contributions accordingly.

The Treasurer confirmed that responses have been received from Caerphilly, Bridgend and Newport querying the pay award. He confirmed that he has been in consultation with the Treasurers from the 10 constituent authorities where the issue of any pay awards has been discussed and the recommendation to Members for delegated powers for the Treasurer to reduce accordingly.

Councillor Brown commented that, with constituent authorities struggling with their own budget is it remiss of the Authority to request more funds than is required.

The Treasurer confirmed that discussions have taken place with the Treasurers who have confirmed that it is more prudent for councils to budget on a worst case scenario basis and have money refunded rather than be presented with a lower budget followed by a request for more funds.

Councillor Smith noted that just three out of 10 responses were received and queried whether the current consultation process is adequate.

The Treasurer confirmed that the response to Caerphilly in relation to the pay award was copied to all 10 constituent authority Treasurers, with this query answered they may not have seen the value in responding. He confirmed that historically the Authority has never received responses from all 10 constituent authorities, advising the authorities that if no response is received then they would assume that there are no comments to make.

RESOLVED THAT

- 47.3.1 Members approved the contribution budget at £77,530,089 representing an increase of 3.54%
- 47.3.2 Members confirmed the Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 2
- 47.3.3 Members agreed to delegate to the Treasurer discretion to reduce the contributions budget for next year should there be a material downward difference in the actual pay awards for 2021/22 and also gives delegated powers to the Treasurer to make such calculations as may be necessary and to adjust/refund constituent council contributions accordingly.

47.4 REPORT ON THE STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE INDICATOR TARGETS 2021/22

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery presented the report in relation to the Strategic Performance Indicator Targets for 2021/22, and detailed the seven Strategic Performance Indicators, four of which are incident based indicators, two fatality and injury indicators and one being an effective response indicator.

Councillor Smith noted the statistics, and queried the main factors with regards to road traffic collisions. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery advised there are a number of factors including the use of mobile phones, under

the influence of drink or drugs, not paying attention and speed. He noted there has been a decrease in RTCs this year, partly due to Covid, but also due to the successful proactive work the Service undertakes with key target groups such as young drivers. This work will continue, particularly when schools re-open.

Councillor Brown queried the increase in special service calls noting that these calls appear to be just over the upper range of the predicted level. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer, Service Delivery advised that this is a result of the increase in flooding incidents as well as assistance given to partners such as WAST as a result of the pandemic.

RESOLVED THAT

47.4.1 Members endorsed the Performance Indicator Targets proposed for 2021/22

47.4.2 Members approved delegation to Assistant Chief Fire Officer to review Q4 2020/21 data, planned reduction strategies and refine targets as necessary.

The Deputy Chair took over Chair of the meeting whilst the Chair was temporarily unavailable.

47.5 REPORT ON RESPONSES TO THE CONSULTATION ON THE STRATEGIC THEMES AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2021/22

The Deputy Chief Officer presented the report that advises Members of the recent consultation with the public on the Strategic Themes and Objectives developed for 2021/2022 and requested that Members consider the responses received during the consultation that ran from 26th October 2020 to 17th January 2021.

The Deputy Chief Officer advised that 154 responses had been received, these responses indicate that the public and partners are strongly in agreement with the Service's proposed 2021/2022 objectives, with 89% of responses in agreement with the Service's proposed objectives.

She advised that the consultation ran internally as well as externally, and it is important to note public response has an impact when looking at some of the internal focus work. The Deputy Chief Officer expressed disappointment with the number of responses received internally, but advised that during the pandemic there has been a number of surveys run within staff groups which could have resulted in the lack of responses.

The Deputy Chief Officer provided a summary of the survey and the responses received, advising that 58% of responses were from internal members of staff,

with 42% being from number of different partners such as local health boards, local councils and public service boards.

It was generally felt that the survey was easy to read, although some comments were made in relation to font, length of survey and the accessibility via the internet with some commenting the survey was hard to locate.

There was a slight level of disagreement with the objectives, predominately from Service personnel, but overall 98% of the public supported the objectives.

When looking at the individual areas, some members of staff disagreed or strongly disagreed with the 'responding to your emergency' and 'keeping you safe' objectives, given they are the Service's core statutory duties this is of concern. Overall the largest proportion of disagreement related to the valuing of people and the work the Service is carrying out with Investors in People.

Also disappointing was the lack of responses from minority groups, with 97% of respondents identified as Welsh/White or British/ White, with only one responder identifying as Black. Work has been ongoing in relation to extending the categorisation of ethnic minorities, learning will be taken from this review.

Councillor Shaw queried, given the large area covered by the Authority is there any significance with the lower number of responses. The Deputy Chief Officer advised that due to the pandemic face to face engagement has not been possible, this has somewhat impacted on the number of responses, as the Service utilise many of our public engagement events to engage the public about the plan.

The Deputy Chief Officer advised that this may be the last year the Service will be required to consult with the public and partners, due to legislative changes, but that definite timelines are not as yet available.

Councillor Brown queried whether space for comments could be included, this would allow for more detailed responses. The Deputy Chief Officer believed that space for comments was already provided, she agreed to check.

Councillor Brown also queried homeworking for staff. The Deputy Chief Officer confirmed that the Health and Safety team has been working with line managers providing risk assessments, staff have also been provided with ICT equipment such as laptops to enable them to work from home.

The Deputy Chief Officer confirmed that the biodiversity plan and carbon reduction plan previously endorsed by the Fire and Rescue Authority have been promoted within the Service via staff forums, newsletters etc.

Councillor Naughton was pleased to note the overwhelming positive feedback, but noted most of the negative responses have been made by members of staff.

The Deputy Chief Officer advised that, out of approximately 2000 members of staff, just four members of staff provided negative responses. She confirmed that staff wellbeing is a consideration within the IIP assessment that is due to be completed soon. The final report will be taken to the HR & Equalities Committee, an un-redacted copy of the report will also be available for staff.

The Chair was pleased with the level of responses, commenting that this level of response would be welcomed by any other organisation.

RESOLVED THAT

Members considered and approved the Strategic Themes and Objectives (collectively considered as our improvement objectives).

48. REPORTS FOR INFORMATION

48.1 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY 2020/2021

The Deputy Chief Officer presented the Forward Work Programme for 2020/21 and confirmed all items are on schedule to complete the Work Programme.

The Chair resumed Chairmanship of the meeting.

49. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT (PART 1 OR 2)

There were no items of business deemed urgent by the Chair.