

COMMISSIONERS FOR SOUTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

MINUTES OF THE COMMISSIONERS FOR SOUTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 28 MARCH 2024 AT 1000 HRS IN MEETING ROOM 08 AND REMOTELY VIA TEAMS

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

Baroness Wilcox of Newport, Chair
Mr Vij Randeniya
Mr Carl Foulkes
Kirsty Williams CBE

OFFICERS PRESENT:

T/CFO Stuart Millington, T/ACFO D Loader – Director of Service Delivery, ACO A Reed – Director of People Services, ACO G Thomas – Monitoring Officer & Director of Corporate Services, T/ACFO B Thompson – Director of Technical Services, Mrs S Watkins – Deputy Monitoring Officer & Head of Corporate Support, Mrs L Mullan – T/Head of Finance, Procurement and Property, Mr W Thomas – Head of Service, Performance and Communications, Ms L Grogan – Lead Communications, Attraction and Engagement Officer

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

6. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairperson, Lady Wilcox welcomed all to the first substantive meeting and looked forward to discussing and debating the agenda items.

7. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS OF FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 12 FEBRUARY 2024

Commissioners agreed the minutes from Monday 12 February 2024 as a true record of discussions.

8. UPDATE ON OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

This item was added to the agenda to examine the outstanding actions that remain on the action summary from the previous governance structure within the Service. As a result of this the Chief Fire Officer has reviewed and removed those actions relevant to previous Fire Authority position. One action remained relating to Fire Fighters Pension as a result of the changes to pensions via McCloud ruling. Commissioner Kirsty Williams requested this action to be removed from the action log, with regular updates on progress provided. The Monitoring Officer suggested that as part of the governance, this could be picked up as part of the People Committee Forward Work Programme.

There were no further outstanding actions.

9. REPORTS FOR DECISION

9.1. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

The Fire and Rescue Service is required to publish a Pay Policy Statement for each financial year which sets out the policy approach on pay for the new financial year. The ACO of People Services presented the report and sought approval from the Commissioners for South Wales Fire and Rescue Service to publish the Statement by the required deadline of 31 March 2024. The report referenced specific aspects of the Morris report into the culture of the Service and how it impacts the Pay Policy Statement.

The Morris report recommended that the Service review and pause the use of all temporary promotion in excess of six months. The ACO of People Services advised that this work has been started and that there will be some changes going forward in terms of permanently recruiting into roles. This was welcomed by the Commissioners.

As pay awards are negotiated and agreed by the NJC, the statement will be updated and we are currently waiting for these negotiations to take place for corporate employees, effective of 1st April 2024.

Mr Foulkes queried whether remuneration at Executive Level is the same within every service. The ACO of People Services informed that there are different levels across Fire and Rescue Services within the UK but the NJC will negotiate centrally a Brigade Managers pay award which is a standard pay increase across all Principal Officers. In SWFRS Pay Policy Statement, it highlights there is a two-track approach, one being centrally negotiated pay via the NJC, with the other being a negotiated settlement

that is agreed locally by the relevant Commissioners board.

RESOLVED THAT

9.1.1. Commissioners for South Wales Fire and Rescue Service reviewed and approved the Pay Policy Statement for 2024/2025.

9.2. MATERNITY LEAVE PROVISION

The Morris report into the Culture of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service contained a recommendation to review the Service's family friendly policies, one aspect of which was the Maternity Leave Procedure. Whilst more work is to be done in terms of a full and comprehensive review of the maternity provision and the supporting procedure, the report proposed an immediate change to the duration of full paid maternity leave from four and a half months to twelve months. The Head of Finance confirmed that the cost of this is not significant at present.

The ACO of People Services confirmed that this is a priority piece of work for the Service. Phase 2 of the proposal will further evaluate the current provisions in the workplace to ensure that there is adequate support for new and expectant mothers. The Policy and Procedure Working Group will be reviewing the Service's Family Friendly Policies going forward.

RESOLVED THAT

9.2.1 Commissioners approved the extension of the current arrangement of maternity leave/pay to 52 weeks on full pay for eligible employees.

9.3 GENDER PAY GAP 2023

Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017 (the public sector Regulations), all public authorities are required to publish Gender Pay Gap information by reporting the percentage differences in pay between their male and female employees. The deadline for publication is 31 March 2024.

The report referenced aspects of the Morris report into the culture of South Wales Fire and Rescue Service and how this is likely to impact the Gender Pay Gap in future years.

On the Gender Pay Gap Report 2023, Appendix 1, Kirsty Williams queried the statement *'As part of the Recruitment and Attraction Strategy, South Wales Fire and Rescue Service actively encourages applications from women, from all backgrounds, across all roles and is also working actively with focus groups to better understand how we break down any perceived barriers to females undertaking uniformed roles in the Service'*. It was felt that the term *'perceived barriers to females'* is putting the blame on women and for the word *'perceived'* to be removed from the report before publication.

RESOLVED THAT

9.3.1 Commissioners approved the 2023 Gender Pay Gap Report as of Appendix 1 to be published by 31 March 2024.

9.4 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Annual Treasury Management Strategy Statement and associated information is required to be approved in advance of the new financial year. The Strategy provides the necessary framework from which officers will manage treasury activities.

The Deputy Treasurer provided a presentation to the Board of Commissioners providing a background to Treasury Management and its requirements on the Service. This will allow Commissioners to consider and have oversight of the treasury management activities required to ensure adequate liquidity and that longer-term capital planning is prudent, sustainable, and affordable.

Commissioners will be provided with specialist training in the Treasury Management Strategy area and a development session on the Capital Programme.

Mr Randeniya referred to a recommendation in the Morris Report under facilities to assess all facilities and equipment and to take steps to ensure it is inclusive based on the protected characteristics and has this recommendation been factored into the Capital Investment and Borrowing Strategy. The Deputy Treasurer confirmed that this part of the KC's review has been factored into the budgetary cycle and capital programme made up of individual projects, one being the ED&I project. An audit has been undertaken at all the Services building portfolios and

issues found are being addressed and invested into.

RESOLVED THAT

9.4.1 Commissioners noted and approved the following;

The Treasury Management Statement Strategy (TMSS)
Capital/Prudential Indicators
Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Strategy
Borrowing Strategy
Treasury Indicators and Limits
Annual Investment Strategy (AIS)
The Treasurer to update Strategies/Policies, as necessary.

9.5 STRATEGIC THEMES AND OBJECTIVES FOR 2024/25

The Monitoring Officer provided a Year 5 update on the Service's Strategic Plan. The themes and objectives for 2024/25 have been set in the context of the background of the Culture Review and the publication of the recommendations made by Fenella Morris KC in the report. The plan had gone through considerable amount of consultation throughout the organisation and looks to identify the improvements needed in the Service, across all aspects over the next 5 years. The complete plan has been published and sets out eight strategic themes:

- Keeping you Safe
- Responding to your Emergency
- Protecting & Enhancing our Environment
- Working with Partners
- Involving and Communicating
- Valuing our People
- Using Technology Well
- Continuing to Work Effectively

Commissioners will be provided with progress reports throughout the year on how the Service is progressing against the actions set. The Monitoring Officer confirmed the report is formally reviewed on a 12-month basis.

RESOLVED THAT

9.5.1 Commissioners noted the contents of the Strategic Plan and wanted assurance that the report will be engaged by the workforce as a way

forward following the Morris report. The plan was approved to be published by the end of March 2024, as part of the Services statutory requirements.

The Monitoring Officer thanked the Service Performance and Communications team for their work to develop the plan.

9.6 REPORT ON THE STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE INDICATOR TARGETS 2024/2025

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer for Service Delivery presented the report for Commissioners to consider the Strategic Performance Indicator Targets for 2024/2025. The Performance Indicators are a statutory requirement under the Local Government (Wales) Measure (2009) which is then reported to Welsh Government on seven Strategic Performance Indicators. The report contained methodology for how the Service sets its targets going forward.

RESOLVED THAT

9.6.1 Commissioners noted the Performance Indicator Targets for 2024/2025.

9.6.2 Commissioners approved delegation to the ACFO for Service Delivery to review Quarter 4 2023/2024 data and planned reduction strategies and refine targets as necessary.

9.6.3 Commissioners approved publication of targets onto the SWFRS intranet site.

9.7 INTERNAL AUDITORS ANNUAL REPORT 31 MARCH 2024 & INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2024/25.

The report summarised the Internal Audit work that has been undertaken during this financial year and presented the 2024/25 plan for internal audit by TIAA.

Lady Wilcox stated that whilst there are some areas of improvement, there are a lot of positives and that we must focus on these going forward.

Mr Gourlay, TIAA provided an overview of the Internal Audit Annual Report.

Once approved, the audit opinions presented and signed off, will go forward and be put into the annual governance statement which will be considered later by the Finance Committee which then gets fed into the annual statement of accounts. This will then be audited by Audit Wales as part of the Financial Audit Statement.

RESOLVED THAT

9.7.1 Commissioners noted the work and overall opinion of the Internal Auditors for the financial year 2023/24.

9.7.2 Commissioners approved the draft annual Internal Audit Plan for 2024/25.

9.8 POTENTIAL GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE AND ASSOCIATED COMMITTEE CALANDAR 2024-2025

The Monitoring Officer presented a potential overview of the Governance Structure going forward. Four Committees would all report back to the 'Board of Commissioners Committee'.

There is a legal requirement for the Service to have a Local Pensions Board as part of the Firefighters Pension Scheme. There will also be the Finance Committee, People Committee and Culture Review Programme Governance Committee. The structure under the Culture Review Committee would be to hold an internal Service Review Board chaired by the Chief Fire Officer. The Culture and Thematic Review Working Groups would report to this Board.

The aim is to get in place a calendar of meetings for the next financial year so that a forward work programme can be developed to support Commissioners.

The Commissioners are meeting on 5th April 2024 to look at a more robust process around the Governance Structure and requested the Monitoring Officer to provide as much information as possible to help support this.

10. REPORTS FOR INFORMATION

10.1 PEOPLE SERVICES RESTRUCTURE

ACO People Services presented the report for information which provided an overview of the restructure of the Human Resources department to a Business Partnering – People Services model, following initial work undertaken over the last year and developed further by the recent appointment of a new Head of People Services.

The Morris report highlighted the need for a new structure within the People Services directorate. Commissioners were informed that the directorate anticipates requiring temporary resource for 12 months to help support the transition phase.

The Head of Finance, Procurement and Property confirmed that this restructure has not been budgeted for. The finance team are looking at setting up a system to record all of the additional costs that are coming in and that can potentially be funded by deferring or prioritising works before considering the use of reserves. Kirsty Williams requested that Commissioners be provided with a session to advise them of the financial plans going forward.

RESOLVED THAT

10.1.1 Commissioners noted the content of the report and approved the implementation of the new business model.

10.2 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR SOUTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

Commissioners noted the content of the Forward Work Programme presented by the Monitoring Officer. Work is to commence around the development of the Culture Review Implementation Committee Board and the reports anticipated to be presented to the Board and its Terms of Reference.

10.3 TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRPERSON DEEMS URGENT (Part 1 or 2)

There were no items deemed as urgent. Lady Wilcox thanked Chris Barton, former Treasurer and wished him the best on his retirement.

Following this, the Chairperson declared the meeting closed.

