

**COMMISSIONERS FOR SOUTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE
SERVICE**

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
HELD ON FRIDAY, 19 APRIL 2024
IN MEETING ROOM 8 OR REMOTELY VIA TEAMS**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT

Baroness Wilcox of Newport (Chair)
Kirsty Williams CBE

OFFICERS PRESENT:- CFO Stuart Millington, Mr G Thomas – Monitoring Officer & ACO Corporate Support, T/ACFO Dean Loader – Director of Service Delivery, T/ACFO Brian Thompson – Director of Technical Services, Mrs L Mullan – T/Head of Finance, Procurement & Property, Mr S Gourley – TIAA Internal Auditor

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chair's announcements.

3. REPORTS FOR DECISION

3.1 COMMUNITY SAFETY FUNDING 2024-2025

The Temporary ACFO Technical Services reported on the Deputy Minister's announcement regarding the change in grants this year.

He advised the revenue grant funding has been reduced and approved for community fire safety programmes and the loss to the Service equates to £167k, with this funding directly impacting on the Arson Reduction Grant of £107k and the Innovations Grant of £60k. He further advised that this report was now for information purposes only as the funding has been secured since the writing the report.

RESOLVED THAT

3.1.1 The Commissioners for SWFRS approved the report following slight amendment to paragraph 1.4 and agreed to support funding of £20k for 6 months, for the continuation of two distinct arson reduction activities impacted by the loss of grant funding, these

being the out of hours services for Domestic Violence and Cylinder Retrieval. These projects will continue to be supported by the Commissioners for SWFRS and absorbed into business as usual work.

3.1.2 Lady Wilcox wished to note her thanks to the Cabinet Secretary for her reply to the correspondence relating to funding which will not now need to be sought from the Service's reserves.

3.1.2 A further review to take place in 3 months' time.

3.2 REVENUE MONITORING REPORT 2023/2024

The Head of Finance, Procurement and Property provided details on the annual revenue budget and associated information for the year ending 31 March 2024.

The Monitoring Officer explained 'modern.Gov' will assist the Service in moving to a paperless system and become in line with legislation. The stipulation is that Welsh Government can require FRS's to comply with this legislation, which will only be a matter of time. The Service will consider its implementation once the ICT department have the capacity to do so. It was noted that the Service does not need to comply to this legislation at present.

Kirsty Williams queried whether the Service carries out analysis on the capturing of information in relation to the foundation of the economy including purchasing power to demonstrate to Welsh Government the type of work that the Service carries out for the benefit of the economy, as a good news story as it is a very positive narrative. The Head of Finance, Procurement and Property advised that there is a NFCC toolkit in place for this.

Lady Wilcox stressed that increasing costs will be carefully discussed by the Commissioners of SWFRS who will be mindful not to infringe on the public purse. Further, Lady Wilcox advised that Welsh Government need to understand the seriousness of the changes that need to be made, costs are not cost-neutral and the Commissioners of SWFRS will not spend rashly. If there is a need for extra resources, this will be for the need to improve the Service by delivering the transformation programme in order to make the Service better.

Kirsty Williams stressed the Service requires a plan and governance structure around this as it seems a little piecemeal. She advised of the need to work with colleagues to consider what the implementation plan is and what other resources need to be allocated to the plan and some de-

prioritised. She further advised that although the Head of Finance, Procurement and Property is well placed to support the Commissioners of SWFRS to allocate resources appropriately however a clear plan is required, in governance structure form, together with an audit trail.

Lady Wilcox reiterated that a clear audit trail is essential in all that the Service carries out and there will be a cost to the huge transformation task given.

The Chief Fire Officer explained he had to respond swiftly and make decisions quickly, which was demand led. The Service is now at a time of reflection and will devise a governance structure, going forward. The Monitoring Officer reported that, in relation to prioritising, there is a need on occasion to pump-prime projects for medium to longer term results for transformation projects and decide what will drop off. Lady Wilcox stressed that the Commissioners of SWFRS are aware of the strains upon the public purse however this is being carried out appropriately.

RESOLVED THAT

3.2.1 The Commissioners for SWFRS noted and agreed the report content, following slight amendment to paragraph 2.2.2.

3.2.2 The Commissioners of SWFRS requested that a 'Scrutiny' column be added to the reserve statement table at Appendix 3 for future reporting.

3.2.3 The Commissioners for SWFRS requested the grant monitoring table at Appendix 4 be enlarged for reporting at future meetings.

3.2.4 The Head of Finance, Procurement and Property to provide Kirsty Williams with additional information on University Health Boards.

3.3 CAPITAL MONITORING REPORT 2023/2024

The Head of Finance, Procurement and Property provided details on the capital budget, transactions to date and the forecast year end position for the year ending 31 March 2024.

Lady Wilcox wished to note that the figures contained within this report will always increase and raised concern with budget lines.

RESOLVED THAT

3.3.1 The Commissioners for South Wales Fire and Rescue Service noted the budget and progress of capital schemes and approved

the alterations identified in Appendix 1 and associated movements in funding.

3.3.2 Lady Wilcox requested regular updates in relation to New Inn Station.

3.3.3 Lady Wilcox requested regular updates in relation to operational equipment.

3.3.4 Lady Wilcox requested an update on the RAAC survey.

4. REPORTS FOR INFORMATION

4.1 REGISTER OF GIFTS AND HOSPITALITY

The Monitoring Officer provided an overview of the gifts and hospitality recorded on the Register of Gifts and Hospitality for the 2023-2024 financial year.

RESOLVED THAT

4.1.1 The Commissioners for South Wales Fire and Rescue Service noted the contents of the Register of Gifts and Hospitality in line with internal audit recommendations.

4.1.2 Lady Wilcox requested that, in future, an electronic version of the register be produced to include an open forum, for the purposes of transparency to the public.

4.2 INTERNAL AUDIT PROCESS REPORT & AUDIT ACTION UPDATE

The Monitoring Officer and Internal Auditor provided an update on progress being made against the Internal Audit Plans for 2022/23 and 2023/24.

The Monitoring Officer wished to report that he has nominated the Accountancy Team at the Finance Wales Awards scheduled to take place on Thursday, 16 May at Mercure Holland House Hotel, Cardiff.

Lady Wilcox wished to take the opportunity to thank the internal auditor on behalf of the Committee for the work being undertaken for the Service which is greatly appreciated.

RESOLVED THAT

- 4.2.1 The Commissioners of SWFRS noted the internal audit recommendations and work completed to date.
- 4.2.2 An invite to be extended to Lady Wilcox and the Chief Fire Officer for attendance at the Finance Wales Awards Ceremony.
- 4.2.3 Lady Wilcox to be involved in the Annual Audit Programme, going forward.

4.3 BUSINESS PLAN ACTIONS REPORT 2023-2024 QUARTER 3

The Chief Fire Officer and Monitoring Officer reported on the business plan actions health check 2023-2024 Quarter 3 (1 October-31 December 2023).

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service does need to identify a more robust process to meet gains and highlight areas where there are issues. Improvements are being made and the report does present a clear picture of challenges that are not being achieved.

Kirsty Williams suggested devising a more performance/policy type report and highlight areas causing difficulties and cause for concern. She further noted the need to give consideration to continuous improvement and the need for floor to board clear reporting. Further, she highlighted the need to create a culture of psychological safety, for staff to feel comfortable asking for help. The organisation's approach is to improve its culture. Departments are struggling to report to Commissioners, therefore, a process of continued learning is also required. Staff need to know how to respond when being told things are going badly, and consideration be given to what process is in place. Staff are to be assured they can raise concerns and the Service will provide the support without fear.

The Chief Fire Officer raised the importance of the Service moving to a position where all staff have the confidence to raise issues without fear of repercussions, he stressed the importance of doing so to avoid situations getting any worse.

The Monitoring Officer took a forward view on how the Service will compile the report going forward to identify more robust processes in capturing ongoing work.

RESOLVED THAT

4.3.1 The Commissioners for SWFRS noted and agreed the content of the report following slight wording amendment to the Bariatric update at page 152.

4.3.2 Chief Fire Officer to keep Lady Wilcox regularly updated on the position on unwanted fire signals.

5. FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME

Lady Wilcox provided a brief update and explained the Forward Work Programme for 2024/2025 is a working document.

RESOLVED THAT

5.1 The Commissioners for SWFRS agreed to note the content of the Forward Work Programme for 2024/2025.

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

There were no further items of business to consider that Lady Wilcox deemed urgent.