

COMMISSIONERS FOR SOUTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE

MINUTES OF THE COMMISSIONERS FOR SOUTH WALES FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY AT 10:00 IN MEETING ROOM 08 AND REMOTELY VIA TEAMS

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT:

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: ACO Alison Reed – Director of People Services, ACFO Dean Loader – Director of Service Delivery, T/ACFO Christian Hadfield – Director of Corporate Services, Lisa Mullan – Head of Finance, Procurement and Property, Dominic Mika – Director of Strategic Change and Transformation, Gabrielle Greathead – Interim Monitoring Officer, T/AM Mike Wyatt – Head of Risk Reduction, T/AM Matt Jones – Head of Operations, Wayne Thomas – T/Head of Corporate Support

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Chief Fire Officer Fin Monahan, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Brian Thompson and Kate Harvard from Audit Wales.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

3. CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Chairperson announcements.

4. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF:

a. BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR SOUTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 19 DECEMBER 2024

The Commissioners agreed the minutes from Thursday 19 December 2024 as a true record of discussion and no matters arising.

b. FINANCE AND AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 20 SEPTEMBER 2024

The Commissioners agreed the minutes from Friday 20 September 2024 as a true record of discussion and no matters arising.

5. UPDATE ON OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

The action log has been updated accordingly.

6. REPORTS FOR DECISION

6.1 REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGET DETERMINATION FOR 2025/26

Lisa Mullan presented the report which follows from the consultation budget presented to the Finance and Audit Committee on 19 December 2024. We are looking at a 5.7% increase on fire levies across the 10 unitary authorities. A letter was sent to all Chief Executives and Section 151 Officers, and we received 3 formal responses which 2 are attached in Appendix 1. We had received a late response from Newport Council, and this will be uploaded for transparency. A notable theme was the National Insurance Contributions (NIC), our efficiency programme and the plans for managing our budget going forward.

Lisa Mullan took the Committee through the report in detail and explained the context of setting the budget. We have a medium-term financial strategy, but this requires updating and is not published. Revenue budget overspends are at 1.2% which is mostly the cost of change and transformation which is taken from reserves. This trend will continue into next year with a lesser projected overspend to be funded from the reserves. Reserves also accommodate investment into our long-term objectives such as Sustainability, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion and firefighter welfare, specifically the issue of contaminants.

Lady Wilcox would like to record her thanks to Lisa Mullan for the detailed report and all the work that has been completed, recognising there have been staffing issues. There was a discussion surrounding setting a medium-term financial plan with the possibility of halting our projects. It was stated that future engagement with Local Government needs to happen earlier. Lady Wilcox stressed we must look at what we are doing and that we are providing good value for money for our communities and public service. Carl Foulkes clarified whether we would have a medium-term financial plan from 2025/26. Lisa Mullan stated this must happen and has scheduled meetings in April with all Directors and their Heads of Service to start collecting the data to understand our starting position and to measure the value of the efficiencies and define what these will look like.

Christian Hadfield provided a snapshot of the CRMP as a full report will be brought to the Board of Commissioners in March. It has started and there is a financial investment into this. Christian Hadfield is taking a blank approach, and this will require solid data for us to understand. This will take approximately 20 weeks from the point of procuring a system and the data collection and then they will move on to the decision-making process.

Carl Foulkes asked about the current capital programme. Dean Loader and Lisa Mullan sits on the Property Steering Group that looks at the medium to longer term look at our property investment plan and Christian Hadfield will join this from a CRMP perspective. The Property department will be categorising projects in what we must continue with as we have signed contracts, what is falling into questionable, and what is not going ahead. We have committed to the work at New Inn and Lisa Mullan is of the view that this needs to continue. The Commissioners requested specific information around New Inn to get assurance if we need to break or pause the contract, whilst recognising the impact of staff currently not being at the station.

Vij Randeniya commented that there are things that we can look at now that doesn't fall out of the medium term financial plan and thought it would be useful to have breakdown data on our major spends such as which projects we have, when were the contracts signed or due to be signed and what are the costings to give assurance around where we are in terms of those positions on those contracts. The Property Steering Group will be meeting in March and will determine these definitive pieces. The Commissioners would like to know all our big spends and not just property, such as programmes and capital spends and would like this fed into the Finance and Audit Committee and then to Board of Commissioners, timescales on this is to be decided. Kirsty Williams queried from a governance perspective where would the Commissioners see the output of the work at the Property Steering Group, where does it feed into and where is the oversight. The Commissioners would want some oversight of this to sense check the work that is going on. Dominic Mika provided a narrative around the governance structure; the director level would bring it into the SLT Planning and Performance and then feed into the Boards.

All actions arising out of this agenda item were noted and understood.

RESOLVED THAT

- 6.1.1 The Commissioners approved the proposed revenue and capital budgets included within the report.

6.1.2 The Commissioners delegated authority to the Treasurer to make appropriate adjustments to the revenue budget and fire levies if NIC funding is paid directly to the Commissioners by specific grant.

6.1.3 Lady Wilcox requested that replies are sent back to formal responses that we received from the budget consultation.

6.2 APPROVAL OF SWFRS GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

Dominic Mika presented an overview of the committee structure and the purpose of each meeting. Kirsty Williams asked for clarity around the Property Steering Group and why this is not explicitly mentioned in the governance framework and requested clarification on the decision making process and how this is communicated up to Board of Commissioners level.

It was explained that it would be the responsibility of the Director to feed up to the board and this is set out in the constitutional document on who has authority to make these decisions. Carl Foulkes stated that early agreement and conversations with the lead Commissioner on what comes to the board and how this is fed in is necessary. All statutory papers are where they need to be and work has been done on the Forward Work Programme on which board reports come to.

Vij Randeniya commented that no reference is made to the CRMP in the risk area. Dominic Mika stated they are looking at how they bring this into SLT Performance and Planning, as this develops the process will change. The Chief Fire Officer is prioritising this piece of work on risk and will be brought back to SLT soon as it will be a much larger piece.

Lady Wilcox queried if the framework will be reviewed periodically, how this is going to be done and what are the timescales of when the reviews will take place. It was agreed that Dominic Mika and Wayne Thomas will take this away and consider a formal review process and timeline.

RESOLVED THAT

6.2.1 The Commissioners approved the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service Draft Governance Framework.

6.2.2 Dominic Mika and Wayne Thomas to consider a formal reviewing process of the governance framework.

7. REPORTS FOR INFORMATION

7.1 CARBON REDUCTION PLAN ANNUAL UPDATE

Lisa Mullan presented an update on the Carbon Reduction Plan (CRP). There will be an updated report presented at the March Board of Commissioners meeting that will provide further strategic direction as we now have permanent resource in place. Lisa Mullan is looking at ways to bolster this area of work. Vij Randeniya suggested looking at the Welsh Government research of CO2 by capturing our contribution to reducing CO2 as our unique selling point by doubling fires and how we can capture this. There were suggestions at looking at a Masters graduate placement for this area of data capturing. Carl Foulkes supported the idea of involving a university graduate to support capturing a broader piece of data.

RESOLVED THAT

- 7.1.1 The Commissioners noted the progress made on the CRP 2020-23 and look forward to the new Carbon Reduction Plan at the March Board of Commissioners.

7.2 COMMUNITY FIRE SAFETY UPDATE

Mike Wyatt, Area Manager Risk Reduction provided a summary of the Community Fire Safety update report and noted recruitment in Community Safety has been positive with interest from a recent vacancy. Activity trackers have been put in place to monitor what is currently ongoing which has led us to develop a new recording system where we can track ongoing activities and allow us to report to Welsh Government when requested. Mike Wyatt is continuing to seek out partnership working by establishing what we currently have and looking around the country and to HMI to see what other ideas there are on who we can collaborate with. A strategic plan has been drawn up in the department which is due to go live imminently. There is currently development and innovation in the department and the team were a part of a project in the University Health Wales contributing to Project Edward panel. Mike Wyatt stated that we are looking to factor in data for Fire Investigation and consider how we use this data more effectively and will feedback the developments of this in time. Mike Wyatt has implemented a new response group around the M37 to look at what we can do after the event.

Vij Randeniya was pleased to hear that the Community Safety team are out at University Hospital Wales and stated that it is a good way of seeing how other partnerships work and building relationships and this is an area we can make a lot of progress by engaging.

Mike Wyatt assured that they are getting out there and linking with partner agencies which is the primary role of the Arson Investigation Team; to look at age concerns, dementia, mobility concerns to identify vulnerable individuals but feels the hardest part is identifying the links but does have a dedicated project manager tasked to this work. Lady Wilcox suggested to reach out to Local Authorities that would hold data on this and partnership agencies, however Mike Wyatt stated there are GDPR restrictions. Carl Foulkes agreed that our need to help vulnerable people provides a good argument to be able to obtain data for us to work in partnership with other agencies and the Commissioners will support this as this was an area which funding was cut from Welsh Government. Vij Randeniya added that the amount of funding we receive for fire alarms, and if we had an assessment of our risk then we can provide this data to show that we are not receiving enough fire alarms for the amount of homes in the community.

RESOLVED THAT

- 7.2.1 The Commissioners note the report as providing an update on Community Safety.

7.3 BUSINESS FIRE SAFETY UPDATE

Mike Wyatt, Area Manager Risk Reduction provided a summary of the Business Fire Safety update report and began by explaining the need for a system that highlights and flags the data that we input to the system. It is important for the department to be diversified and there was a discussion around incorporating a fire engineer. A strategic plan is in place and a risk based inspection programme. We have published a look back on areas in Business Fire Safety and one will be replicated for Community Fire Safety now both departments have a strategy. Carl Foulkes agreed that it feels like the right opportunity to look at a fire engineer and recruit the right people for best practice and offered Commissioner support on ways we modernise the department. Vij Randeniya stated there were some basic points on the report but he is assured that Mike Wyatt and the Business Fire Safety department are working on these. Lady Wilcox agreed and felt that the report feels we are where we should be with forward progression.

Mike Wyatt explained that most issues in the department comes from promotion as people don't remain in the department as they could be allocated a role and the team will have to re-train a member of staff to get qualified, where we need to maintain people with the right skillset. Mike Wyatt will look at the fire engineer piece and take this away for

consideration. It was reiterated that the Commissioners are open about how they could support this.

RESOLVED THAT

7.3.1 The Commissioners note the report as providing an update on Business Fire Safety.

7.4 ON CALL STRATEGY/ IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES QUARTER 2 REPORT 2024/25

Matt Jones presented the On Call Strategy and Improvement quarter 2 report and key areas to note were that the On Call system is challenging nationally. We are trying to be dynamic in addressing this and looking at how we make this future fit. There is 576 males and 47 females and so the Service is keen to address how our contracts look to be more family friendly. We are underway on looking at our improvement objective on alternative crewing models. The team are looking at working locations for individuals to be able to provide on call cover. Data has been provided since the implementation of the 20mph speed limit and an early indication shows it is adding a minute per mile. Christian Hadfield is investigating the turnout time.

There was significant improvement to the On Call availability since June 2024 which increased from 63% to 82%. The Service is looking to build an outstanding on call system that's flexible and meets the needs of the organisation. Implementation of recognition for on call will be 5, 10 and 15 years instead of individuals having to wait 20 years. Kirsty Williams wants to highlight the significance of the On Call availability and its improvement. Carl Foulkes echoed the positive news around reward and recognition to involve families in recognising the hard work and time that individuals commit to when being on call.

RESOLVED THAT

7.4.1 The Commissioners noted the progress made for the On Call improvement objectives for Q2.

7.5 SWFRS AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARM (AFA) RESPONSE CHANGE UPDATE

Mike Wyatt, Area Manager provided an update of the automatic fire alarm (AFA) response change since the go live date of 6 January 2025. It was highlighted that there was a school fire on 12 February that came from an alarm receiving centre. Through a change request, the Service incorporated schools and an incident such as this shows how different

the outcome could have been if schools were not included in the response change. Statistics show that there has been a 42% decrease in the number of AFA's attended. The hospital go live date will be the 7 April, there has been 28 calls to hospitals in 2025. The implementation of the change has gone as predicted. Carl Foulkes felt it was important to do what is right when considering the change requests. Lady Wilcox appreciates the ongoing updates they receive from officers on these calls.

Kirsty Williams and Mike Wyatt maintained that would like to see the hospital AFA change before progressing to semi-regular updates. It was raised that we need to ensure that the exemption policy is robust and that exemptions are given because there is a sound reason to do so. The Commissioners are pleased with the progress and praised the work that has gone on. It was suggested that there would be 6 monthly updates once this becomes business as usual.

RESOLVED THAT

7.5.1 The Commissioners note the report as providing an update on the progress of Automatic Fire Alarms response change.

7.6 REPORT ON THE STATUTORY CONSULTATION REGARDING THE ORGANISATION'S ANNUAL IMPROVEMENT OBJECTIVES FOR 2025/26

Wayne Thomas reported on the statutory consultation to the organisational annual improvement objectives for the 2025/26. The reports discussed the statutory requirement under the Local Government of Wales Measures Act. The Service completed 9 face to face consultations, it is important to note that the number of responses were lower than last year as the face to face engagement was valued more. It was also a request in the Morris report to engage in face to face consultations. The Chief Fire Officer delivers feedback from his Principal Officer visits from the station that is incorporated to the feedback and key areas include people, culture, working conditions, discussions around communications and engagement and technology and equipment property and training. The feedback aligns with our future plans and the suggestions received aligns with what the Service is developing.

Our new strategy will be launched with the aim for this to be signed of at the March Board of Commissioners Committee. Carl Foulkes queried whether the feedback from the 10kv overlaps the strategy. The key themes were similar and the team are now putting this together with some pieces to separate out. There is improvement needed on public

consultation as the numbers were low. The Planning, Performance and Risk team are looking at how other fire and rescue services are rolling this out for us to have better community engagement. It is pleasing that our internal engagement has improved with the Chief Fire Officer station and departmental visits, the Hydra 10kv activity and as well as our Vision, Mission and Values.

RESOLVED THAT

7.6.1 The Commissioners reviewed the consultation evaluation in appendix 1.

7.6.2 The Commissioners note the responses to the public consultation detailed in appendix 1 for the Service to consider as it reviews the current Strategic Themes and Objectives and creating a new Vision, Mission and Values.

7.7 FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS FOR SOUTH WALES FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE 2024/25

It was discussed that the March Board of Commissioners contains a heavy agenda and will be split in two parts. Carl Foulkes suggested that if colleagues are comfortable, on this occasion timeslots could be incorporated to manage time effectively.

Lady Wilcox noted that she would like an update on the Monitoring Officer position. Alison Reed has redrafted the job description around the legal requirements of the role and will be meeting with Christian Hadfield to discuss the structure more generally.

RESOLVED THAT

7.7.1 The Commissioners noted the Forward Work Programme for the Board of Commissioners held on 28 March 2025.

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

There were no items that the Chairperson deemed urgent.