

**AWDURDOD TÂN CANOLBARTH A GORLLEWIN CYMRU**



**MID AND WEST WALES FIRE AUTHORITY**

**COFNODION  
CYFARFOD YR GRŴP MODERNEIDDIO  
MINUTES  
OF THE MEETING OF THE MODERNISATION GROUP  
24 MEDI / SEPTEMBER 2009 10:00 – 11:50**

**PENCADLY GWASANAETH TÂN,  
HEOL LLWYN PISGWYDD, CAERFYRDDIN  
FIRE SERVICE HEADQUARTERS,  
LIME GROVE AVENUE, CARMARTHEN**

**50% PRESENOLDEB/ATTENDANCE**

Presennol yn y Cyfarfod/Present at Meeting:

CADEIRYDD/CHAIRMAN: J Dudley

AELODAU/MEMBERS: Cyng/Cllrs: T E Evans, C Philpott,  
G Thomas

YMDDIHEURIADAU/APOLOGIES: Cyng/Cllrs: P Llewellyn, R Llewellyn,  
R Lewis, P James,

YN BRESENNOL /IN ATTENDANCE: A Howells, B Bassett, R Smith, S  
Flather, N Williams

**1 DECLARATION BY MEMBERS OF ANY PERSONAL INTERESTS**

None were declared.

**2 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS / PERSONAL MATTERS**

None were declared.

**3 TO CONFIRM AND CONSIDER THE MINUTES OF THE MODERNISATION WORKING GROUP MEETING HELD ON 23<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2009**

The minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2009 were received and confirmed as a true record.

**4 TO APPOINT A CHAIR FOR THE 2009/2010 MUNICIPAL YEAR**

Councillor J Dudley was nominated and duly seconded. There were no other nominations.

Upon being put to a vote

***It was RESOLVED that Councillor J Dudley be elected Chair of the Modernisation Working Group for the ensuing year 2009/2010.***

**5 TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON THE SILVER CHARTER REQUIREMENTS – PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT INTERVIEWS**

Members were aware that one of the core elements of the Wales Charter for Member Support and Development for Fire Authorities was that Members receive Personal Development Interviews (PDIs) to assess their personal development requirements and identify relevant training opportunities. Members were advised that the Authority intended to apply for the Silver Charter Award in 2010.

The criteria for the Silver Charter noted that 'Office Holders' of the Fire Authority must receive a PDI on an annual basis, however to demonstrate the Fire Authority's commitment to Member development it was previously agreed that all Members undergo an interview. The Charter also indicated that it must be demonstrated that the Member training programme reflected the outcomes of these interviews.

Members were pleased to note that to date 18 out of 25 Members had been interviewed, with dates for the remaining Members having been arranged over the next month.

Consideration was given to the draft training programme which had been developed based on the training needs identified within the PDIs already undertaken. Members were informed that evaluation questionnaires would be promulgated to attendees following each training session as a means of assessing the quality and relevance of the training.

The Head of Corporate Communications and Member Support emphasised that the Silver Charter required evidence that if specific Members request a certain training session as part of their PDI interview, then they should make **every** effort to attend that particular training session.

## **RESOLUTION**

***It be recommended that***

- 1. The Fire Authority approve the Member Development Programme***
- 2. Evaluation questionnaires be issued to Members following each training session***
- 3. The Fire Authority affirm that if specific Members request a certain training session as part of their PDI interview, then they should make every effort to attend that particular training session.***
- 4. The Fire Authority approve the statement: that it 'is a Member's right and responsibility to receive the essential development that they need' and that they should therefore be actively contributing to the training delivery***
- 5. Any Member who has requested a mentor as part of the PDI should be provided with one.***

## **6 TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON THE ADVANCED WALES CHARTER FOR MEMBER SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT**

Members were aware that progress was being made on working towards the Silver advanced level of the Charter. A number of key requirements for the Advanced Charter were considered, as follows:

The Silver Charter stated the need for a 'Member Development Working Group' which had been in existence for at least a year and included Senior Officers. Following discussions, Members considered it fitting to change the name of the Modernisation Working Group to the Member Development Working Group (MDWG). This was deemed appropriate given the work the Group had undertaken in relation to committee structures and Member Development within the last year or so.

Members noted the requirement for role descriptions to be produced for all Members in every potential role, including those for Working Groups or outside bodies. Furthermore, Members would be required to demonstrate that they understood and were undertaking the roles assigned to them.

Members also highlighted the need to evidence the work undertaken by the Member Development Champion for the Fire Authority; these could be verified via

presentation slides or meeting minutes.

Members were informed that the Authority's accessibility arrangements would need to meet the **current** Members' needs. Members expressed the view that this would be effectively achieved by means of issuing another Member survey to determine whether current arrangements in terms of meeting location, times, duration and venues etc were suitable to the needs of Members. Any issues / concerns expressed by Members could then be investigated and dealt with as appropriate.

## **RESOLUTION**

*It was recommended that*

- 1. The name of the Modernisation Working Group be changed to the Member Development Working Group (MDWG).**
- 2. Role descriptions be produced for all Members for every potential role**
- 3. A Member Survey be issued to all Members to determine whether Accessibility Arrangements meet the needs of Members.**

## **7 TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON MEMBER ATTENDANCE**

At the special meeting of the Authority on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2009, the Chair of the Authority expressed his disappointment and concern at the low level of attendance at that meeting (52%) particularly given the importance of the issues being decided upon on that day. The Clerk therefore introduced a report detailing Member attendance levels with a view to exploring mechanisms for future management.

The Chief Fire Officer noted that he welcomed the report, given the importance of member attendance at meetings. The lack of attendance at recent meetings was very concerning given the potential detrimental effects with regard to the decision making process.

Members gave consideration to attendance levels for 2008/09 and noted the following observations:

- An overall attendance level across Authority and Committee meetings of **69%** with member attendance falling within a range of between 31% and 100%. In previous years overall attendance had been in the order of 80%
- Individual member attendance at Authority meetings of between 25% and 100%

- Individual member attendance at Committee meetings of:
  - People and Organisational Development – between 25% and 100%
  - Performance Review & Audit – between 20% and 100%
  - Resources – between 20% and 100%
  - Standards – between 0% and 100%

It was noted that Authority meetings were on average better attended than Committee meetings – 71% compared with People & Organisational Development – 68%, Performance Review & Audit – 68%, Resources – 67% and Standards – 50%.

Members gave consideration to attendance levels for 2009/10 To Date and noted the following observations:

- An overall attendance level across Authority and Committee meetings of **60%** with member attendance falling within a range of between 0% and 100%.
- Individual member attendance at Authority meetings of between 0% and 100%
- Individual member attendance at Committee meetings of:
  - People and Organisational Development – between 0% and 100%
  - Performance Review & Audit – between 0% and 100%
  - Resources – between 0% and 100%

Authority meetings were on average better attended than Committee meetings – 68% compared with People & Organisational Development – 40%, Performance Review & Audit – 50% and Resources – 60%.

Whilst there had only been one cycle of meetings to date for Resources and PRAC, the above figures may not present a representative view of potential attendance levels for the year. However, the figures did indicate a worrying trend of declining member attendance levels.

Upon examination of the data there appeared to be no apparent reason as to why attendance levels had declined over the last 18 months. It was noted that a variety of factors could hinder Member attendance e.g. ill health, conflicting personal or constituent authority commitments, timing of Authority meetings etc. Members expressed the view that those Members who could not give the time commitment to the Fire Authority should inform their Constituent Authorities, with a view to reviewing their membership.

Reference was made to the survey carried out amongst Members at the end of 2008. The survey concluded that, overall Members “*were satisfied with the current time and location for Fire Authority and Committee meetings.*” Members confirmed that another survey should be distributed to Members to establish whether or not individual circumstances had changed.

This would enable Officers to ensure that arrangements were appropriate to the needs of Members, as far as practically reasonable.

Councillor Philpott highlighted that those Members who sat on several committees were more likely to have an overall lower attendance figure. It was also noted that the report did not recognise the additional commitments provided by Chairs and Vice Chairs of committees.

Members were pleased to note that the report highlighted those Members who were committed to the Fire Authority with excellent attendance levels.

In terms of future management, the Clerk reported that Authorities generally, including some of the constituent authorities, had introduced, or were in the process of introducing, performance monitoring arrangements for Member attendance and had set benchmark levels of expected attendance levels, together with a protocol for dealing with situations when levels were not attained. Members expressed the view that, in line with some other authorities, it would be beneficial to publish Member attendance levels on the website immediately following authority or committee meetings.

Committee considered a draft protocol for the management of Member attendance. The protocol stipulated that Members would be expected to use their reasonable endeavours to attend at least **66%** of Training and Development events, the meetings of the Authority and also the Committees of which they were a member. In return, officers would provide Members with a wide range of support and information to assist Members in achieving and maintaining those records. In terms of good governance the information would be forwarded to the relevant Constituent Authorities on an annual basis.

Councillor C Philpott suggested that Members should be required to provide reasons for non attendance when tendering their apologies as soon as they become aware that they would not be present. This would assist in developing solutions to improve attendance.

The Clerk highlighted that members of a Working Group which include substitutes amongst their membership were expected by the Authority to arrange for a substitute member to attend in their place if they became aware that they were unlikely to be able to attend a particular meeting.

The Clerk informed Members that whilst there was no correlation between committee structure and low attendance, consideration could be given to implementing a review of the committee structure with a view to improving current processes.

Councillor C Philpott emphasised that prospective new Members needed to be made aware of the commitment that would be required to the Fire Authority. This could be achieved by means of a guidance document outlining the Committee structure, locations, duration and frequency of meetings and expected attendance etc.

## RESOLUTION

*It was recommended that*

- 1. *The Modernisation Working Group monitor Member Attendance as a standing item on the agenda.***
- 2. *A Questionnaire be issued to all Fire Authority Members to determine satisfaction or otherwise with meeting dates, timings, location , duration of meetings etc.***
- 3. *Member attendance levels be published on the website as soon as possible following Authority or committee meetings.***
- 4. *Members endorse the protocol for the management of Member attendance.***
- 5. *Members should at all times tender an apology if they are unable to attend a meeting together with a reason for such non attendance.***
- 6. *A guidance document be issued to Constituent Authorities for prospective new Members to be aware of the commitment required by the Fire Authority.***

### **8 TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITY OF USING VIDEO CONFERENCING FOR COMMITTEE / WORKING GROUP MEETINGS**

The Head of Corporate Communications and Member Support introduced a report which explored the validity of holding various Authority Meetings by means of video conferencing. It was reported that the subject matter had been raised by Authority Members on a number of occasions in recent weeks and was an issue which the Service's ICT Department was in the process of investigating.

Mr Nigel Williams, Head of ICT, reported that video conference facilities were available at HQ in Carmarthen, Morriston, Haverfordwest and Builth Wells, with the installation of another terminal currently being undertaken at Aberystwyth. Members were interested to note that good use of these facilities, both for internal and external meetings, was being made by the Service. It was confirmed that there was the potential for Members to attend these sites, or their respective Constituent Authorities to participate in various Authority meetings such as training events, Member Working Groups etc.

Members discussed the advantages of video conferencing such as sustainability, convenience, reduced travelling time and the payment of travelling expenses for Members.

The Clerk expressed the view that video conferencing could be particularly useful for Member Working Groups but highlighted that governance implications needed to be considered for Authority meetings and its standing committees including the legality of such meetings, the validity of Members' votes, attendance records, attendance by members of the public, dealing with exempt items and staff resourcing.

Members agreed that video conference should be trialled at the next Modernisation Working Group as the governance issues referred to would not be applicable.

**RESOLUTION:**

*It was recommended that:*

***Video Conferencing be trialled at the next Modernisation Working Group.***

**9 TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON REPRESENTATION ON THE RISK REDUCITON PLANNING WORKING GROUP**

Members were reminded that representation on the Authority's Risk Reduction Planning Working Group consisted of a Member representative from each of the six constituent authorities. Fortuitously in the past, the Chair of the Authority had also been the constituent authority representative on the group.

The Clerk reported that there was an expectation for the Chair of the Authority to lead the Authority in any meetings with the Minister / Assembly officials. This had undoubted advantages to the Authority because of the wider role undertaken by the Chair and in particular the relationships developed with the Minister / Assembly officials.

Currently the Chair of the Authority did not sit on the Working Group as of right, although because of the unavoidable absence of the member from the same constituent authority, the Chair had attended such meetings of late and in fact led the Authority at its meeting with the Minister.

Members were requested to regularise the position to avoid such an anomaly in the future. Members gave consideration to the following options:

- That if the Chair of the Authority would not be appointed as a member of the Group in his / her own right that he / she is automatically appointed as a member of the Group (i.e. increasing membership to 7 and thus giving one constituent authority 2 Members on the Group).
- That the Chair of the Authority as of right becomes the relevant constituent authority member on the group (retaining membership at 6). Members were of the view that this option would be fair and transparent.

**RESOLUTION:**

*It was recommended that:*

*That the Chair of the Authority as of right becomes the relevant constituent authority member on the group (retaining membership at 6).*