

**AWDURDOD TÂN AC ACHUB CANOLBARTH A GORLLEWIN
CYMRU**



MID AND WEST WALES FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY

**COFNODION
CYFARFOD YR AWDURDOD
GANOLFAN GYNADLEDDA
PENCADLYS Y GWASANAETH TÂN AC ACHUB
CAERFYRDDIN
Dydd Llun 24 Gorffennaf 2006**

**MINUTES
OF THE AUTHORITY MEETING
THE CONFERENCE CENTRE
FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE HEADQUARTERS
CARMARTHEN
Monday 24 July 2006**

PRESENOLDEB/ATTENDANCE

Presennol yn y Cyfarfod/Present at Meeting:

CADEIRYDD/CHAIRMAN: B J Hall
IS-GADEIRYDD/VICE CHAIRMAN: C J Crowley

AELODAU/MEMBERS: Cyng/Cllrs: J Allen-Mirehouse, Mrs T
Devichand, J Dudley, T E Evans,
D R James, P James, F M Jones,
P Llewellyn, D C Prothero C Morgan,
C Philpott, D C Prothero,
G Seabourne, M Smith, P Spender,
T Theophilus, J D A Thompson,
C Waller, M Williams

YMDDIHEURIADAU/APOLOGIES:

Cyng/ Cllrs: J J J Davies, K Harris,
G Phillips

1. DECLARATION BY MEMBERS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

None were declared.

2. TO CONSIDER AND APPROVE THE STATEMENT ON INTERNAL CONTROL

The Treasurer reported that in order to meet the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003, the Authority each year were obliged to conduct a review of the effectiveness of its system of internal control and publish a Statement on Internal Control (SIC). This had to be specifically considered by the Fire Authority, even though it formed part of the Statement of Accounts. It was a requirement that the most senior officer, the Chief Fire Officer and the Chairman of the Authority should sign the SIC.

RESOLUTION

It was RESOLVED that

the Statement on Internal Control be received and approved

3. TO RECEIVE AND APPROVE THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2005 - 2006

The Treasurer presented the Statement of Accounts for the financial year 2005 - 2006 for the formal approval by Members subject to audit, which was required by 31st July 2006. It was noted that from the 2005-2006 financial year, the presiding Member at the approval Meeting was required to sign and date the Statement of Accounts.

RESOLUTION

It was RESOLVED that

the Fire Authority approve the Statement of Accounts for the financial year 2005-2006 and that the Statement of Accounts be signed by the Chair of the Authority and the Chief Fire Officer

4. TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER ITEMS OF CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE MINISTER FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AND REGENERATION

Consideration was given to a letter received from the Minister for Social Justice and Regeneration to all Fire and Rescue Authority Chairmen, consulting Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) regarding a potential proposal to amend the legislation that governed them. This proposal was considered to be far reaching in that the Minister outlined her possible intention to limit the net expenses of the Fire and Rescue Authorities to the annual uplift in Revenue Support Grant for Local Authorities. The proposal effectively meant that FRAs budgets would be 'capped' at the level of the general increase.

Officers considered the proposal to be puzzling given that Local Authorities through the WLGA had for many years argued against that any such blanket proposals for Local Authorities whilst it was almost unknown for a Service Department Minister to propose limiting the departments own service budget. It was uncertain therefore what had prompted the Minister to write on this issue, even on an 'informal' basis.

The letter seemed to suggest that the proposal was the alternative to becoming a precepting authority yet there was no convincing evidence to require the implementation of either of these regimes. With a 3 year indicative budget planning and possible 3 year settlements in the future, this certainty would be in place.

Officers believed that the fundamental principle to be upheld was if Local Authorities believed that capping was acceptable for one Local Authority Service, then it would be presumed that capping was acceptable for all Local Authority Services. This limiting of expenditure would be only a short step away from hypothecation, a principle that again had been an issue for the WLGA over the last few years. Indeed the WLGA had obtained agreement from the Assembly that the settlement would move away from hypothecation gradually, allowing local politicians to decide on priorities and policies. Members were concerned that the next small step from hypothecation would be direct funding from the centre with possible ramifications for future representation on the Fire and Rescue Authorities.

The constituent Authorities currently had considerable influence over the Fire and Rescue Authorities budgets through their representatives and full consultation was conducted at budget setting time. For many years the Fire and Rescue Services had not had a voice as part of the Wales national expenditure negotiating process and was subject to criticism for any increase in budget over and above inflation. As Members were aware, the Service had faced a number of additional pressures over this time and had managed these without receiving any apparent additional SSA through the constituent authorities. Having recently obtained agreement from the WLGA and WAG officials to FRAs playing a full part in the work of the Expenditure Sub Group, and with the funding arrangements of pensions changing in 2007/08, it was believed the problems that the Minister outlined should not arise. Officers considered that there was little advantage in being part of the negotiating process if future budgets could potentially be limited in the way suggested. Concern was expressed that if the Authority was withdrawn from this process, it would be the only Local Authority body in Wales not to have a voice.

Concern was further expressed that the Minister's proposals did not seem to extend to allowing FRAs to budget for additional burdens imposed from the centre, when presumably WAG would be upholding their promise to the WLGA to fully fund these increases by increasing the constituent authorities SSA. Under the Minister's proposals the FRAs would not benefit from the increases in Fire SSA's but the Local Authorities would.

It was also refuted that the FRAs could 'increase net expenses unhindered, whilst on the other hand the constituent Unitary Authorities were limited in the amount of spending they had available through RSG'. Local Authorities were not limited or 'capped', but they were expected to act responsibly, as were the Fire and Rescue Authorities. Local Authorities further had the comfort of reserves to call on whereas FRAs had to budget precisely in a very dynamic service and attempt to take into account all eventualities in the budget setting process. The Minister stated that she was confident that the FRAs would act responsibly but seemed to feel the necessity to artificially restrict FRAs budgets. Officers believed that her confidence should be reflected in respecting the judgement of those elected locally, to represent the constituent authorities and the council taxpayers in their FRA areas as effectively in the future as they had done in the past and were doing presently. Constraints from central Government had very often prevented the FRAs from delivering the very efficiency savings which could have assisted the FRAs in more effectively managing their budgets. Under the Minister's proposal the Authority would have little choice but to implement efficiency savings, which would possibly be politically unpalatable locally, if it was to come within limited budgets.

At a high level meeting of the Leaders/Chief Executives and Directors of Finance of Local Authorities and other public bodies (including Fire Authorities), together with the WLGA held on 30 June 2006, the WLGA had been called upon to ensure that they reflected both the FRAs and the Local Authorities' views within their response. This call for the Local Authorities to get involved in discussions has led to an immediate reaction from some authorities at the meeting who supported the proposals in order to ensure that Fire and Rescue Service budgets were limited in scope for the foreseeable future. The WLGA had written a holding response pending further debate amongst their members. However, it was considered likely that a balanced response will eventually be composed reflecting both the need for debate regarding the accountability of the FRAs and opposing capping in any form as a matter of fundamental principle of local democracy.

Members debated the implications of the letter vigorously and many were of the view that as the Fire Authority had always upheld a responsible attitude towards its budget setting methodology and had developed a good working relationship with its constituent authorities, the Minister's proposals should be resisted robustly.

Councillor J Thompson, seconded by Councillor T E Evans moved that the resolution be approved and that a meeting be sought with the Minister to discuss her letter face to face at the earliest opportunity. Other Members preferred adopting a more cautious approach by awaiting the written responses from the WLGA, other FRA's and the subsequent responses from the Minister and to consider all possible options. Councillor Philpott, and Waller considered that the terms in the Chief Fire Officer's draft letter were too strong and that the route of negotiation should be kept open at this stage. Councillor Philpott, seconded by Councillor Waller proposed an amendment to the original resolution indicating that although the Authority was opposed to capping in principle it required further information and clarification from the Minister before

a response could be formally made.

Councillor DR James suggested discussing the implications with the other two Welsh Fire Services and it was noted that an opportunity should be arranged to hold this before the next WLGA Fire Forum meeting with the Minister on 18th September.

On taking a vote the amendment was defeated and the action carried.

RESOLUTION

It was RESOLVED

I) that in the interests of the Fire and Rescue Authority and of the continuation of local democratic influence a letter be sent to the Minister opposing the proposal within her letter and opposing capping in any form, outlining the points within the report.

ii) an early meeting be arranged with the North and South Wales Fire Authorities to be followed by a joint meeting with the Minister

5. TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON THE ANNUAL INCREASE IN ALLOWANCES FOR MEMBERS OF FIRE AUTHORITIES

The Clerk reported that payment of allowances to members of Fire and Rescue Authorities was governed by the Local Authorities (Allowances for Members of Fire Authorities) (Wales) Regulations 2004. The regulations enabled authorities from the year commencing 1st April 2005 to make an annual adjustment to allowances payable under their schemes, with adjustment being restricted to the average of any adjustments made by the Authority's constituent councils. The constituent authorities had been advised by the Welsh Assembly Government of the maximum annual increases to their allowances effective from 1st April 2006 as follows :

Special Responsibility Allowances	2.0%
Basic Allowances	3.6%
Care Allowances	3.6%

The constituent authorities had all confirmed that they would be applying the maximum increases noted above and on applying the above rates, the Allowances for Fire & Rescue Authority members for 2006/07 would be:

Fire & Rescue Authority Allowance	£1,094
Chair's Allowance	£9,550
Vice Chair's Allowance	£7,340
Care Allowances (Max. amounts):	
> Chair	£1,467
> Vice Chair	£1,146
>Other Members	£ 399

It was noted that the travelling rate for 2006/07 had been retained at 40p per

mile, which was linked to that payable to Assembly Members. Whilst travelling rates payable by constituent authorities were similarly linked to those of Assembly Members, the level of travelling payable by constituent authorities for 2006/07 ranged from 40p to 50.1p per mile. It was noted that constituent authorities were able to freeze their rates at the level prevailing prior to the new arrangements coming into place and until such time as those payable to Assembly Members caught up.

RESOLUTION

It was RESOLVED that

- i) the Authority approves the revised rates set out in the report for 2006/07*
- ii) the necessary amendments were made to the Authority's "Scheme of Member Allowances"*

6. TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON THE INTERNATIONAL FIREFIGHTERS DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

Members were aware that the Authority had in the past, attended the International Firefighters Day of Remembrance which had been held in the Church of St Mary Le Bow in the City of London.

This year, in addition to the London Memorial Service, it had been proposed that an annual all Wales Service be held, with each Fire and Rescue Service hosting the event in turn. It was proposed that Mid and West Wales host the first Service at Carmarthen in September. The Service would be arranged in conjunction with the Service Chaplain and would encompass multi-faith elements. It was anticipated that it would last for approximately one hour commencing at 11.00am on Sunday 10th September. Dignitaries and colleagues would be invited from across Wales.

RESOLUTION

It was RESOLVED that

- i) the proposed arrangements for an all Wales Memorial Service be approved*
- ii) in the light of the above, a continued presence at the London service would no longer be necessary.*

7. TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON THE AWARD OF AN MBE

Members were delighted to learn that Group Manager John Fitzjohn had recently been awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for his work in the field of "Vehicle Arson Reduction" in the Swansea Bay area.

In 1999 Group Manager Fitzjohn led on a Fire Service response to the problem

of attending to some 1600 car fires in the Swansea Bay area. Working in partnership with local authorities, the police and community groups, hundreds of abandoned cars had been removed thereby dramatically reducing the number of vehicle fires. Swansea Bay had subsequently been held up as an UK best practice example of how to defeat crime.

Group Manager Fitzjohn's commitment and dedication to the initiative ensured not only a reduction in auto arson crime but that working in partnership could vastly improve the quality of life for local communities.

RESOLUTION

It was RESOLVED that

Members formally congratulate Group Manager John Fitzjohn on his award by sending a letter from the Authority.

8. TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON THE ATTENDANCE OF MEMBERS AT THE NETWORKING WOMEN IN THE FIRE SERVICE CONFERENCE

Members were aware that the Authority had agreed to sponsor and attend the above Networking Women in the Fire service Conference which took place at The Fire Service College from the 7-9 July 2006. Councillors Fioled Jones, Cheryl Philpott, Claire Waller and Paul James had attended the event along with a number of Service staff.

The event had been attended by over 300 women and men and there had been a huge range of activities and events to choose from over the course of the weekend. At the welcome event on the Friday evening, the contribution of the three Welsh Fire Authorities in sponsoring the event had been recognised, and the Chief Fire Officer had been presented with a commemorative plaque. The event provided an opportunity for women working in the Fire Service to meet with and interact with many other women in a similar position.

Members attended a wide range of practical events, as well as more seminar-based sessions that covered issues of current concern. Members were able to take part in sessions such as:

- Be a firefighter for a day
- Drive a fire appliance
- Driving and using a forklift truck

all of which gave Members a flavour of aspects of a firefighter's role.

A session was run for Senior Managers exploring different aspects of leadership and leadership styles, which one Member attended. Members were also able to attend sessions exploring issues that may affect staff in the workplace including stress management, disability awareness and sexual orientation awareness.

The event was full of interesting opportunities and a wide variety of activities were available. Although the event was clearly directed mostly at women staff in the Fire and Rescue Service, a number of men attended as delegates or presenters, and a number of Authorities were represented by Members as well as staff.

Overall, the event proved very informative and worthwhile, and Members who attended recommended that the Authority continued to support the Network at similar future events.