

FIRE AUTHORITY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

MINUTES OF A MEETING

24 MAY 2005

2.00 PM

PRESENT: Mr W F Gillespie OBE TD MBA JP DL FCIQB FSCA,
Chairman presiding
Mrs M Black
Mrs S Dixon
Mrs B Gilliland
Mr J Beattie MCIPD
Mr P Bradley CBE MA
Mr J Campbell BA MBA FAIA FCIS FInstAM FCMI
Mr G A Hatch TFA
Mr J Hughes
Mr J Ross FCA ATII
Mr R Pollock

APOLOGIES: Mrs A M McAleenan
Mr J Clarke
Mr K Harper MIFireE
Mr J F McKeever
Mr O Molloy LLB
Mr S J Montgomery BSc MSc MCIQB MRICS MBEng

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Gowdy, Permanent Secretary, DHSSPS
Chief Fire Officer
Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Technical Development)
Director of Human Resources
Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Director of Finance & Performance Management
Corporate Communications Manager
Committee Clerk

Prior to the commencement of business, the Chairman welcomed Mr Clive Gowdy, Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety, to the Meeting.

Mr Gowdy thanked Members for the opportunity to be present at their Board Meeting. He advised Members of the appointment of the new Minister, Mr Shaun Woodward. He gave Members a brief overview of the themes on which the Minister would be focussing during his term of office.

1 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 April 2005, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Ross, seconded by Mr Campbell.

Budget 2005/2006

The Chairman reminded Members that the Authority, at its April Meeting, had approved the 2005/2006 Budget with considerable concern and reluctance, as clearly there would be severe adverse affects on the ground. He informed Members that, as agreed, he and the Chief Fire Officer had sought a meeting with the Department to warn of the consequences of the reduction in expenditure to address the £3.3m budgetary pressure and to seek further funding.

He informed Members that he, the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Finance & Performance Management had met with Mr Paul Simpson, Deputy Secretary and others at the Department the previous week. He gave Members a brief overview of the meeting and stated that he had felt it had been a favourable meeting. It was noted that Mr Simpson would be putting forward the Authority's case for further monies at a Departmental Board meeting on 27 May.

The Chairman referred to the press statement that was to be issued post-election to publicly highlight the Authority's concerns and explained, that in light of the discussions with the Department, he and the Chief Fire Officer felt it would be prudent not to issue any statement pending the outcome of the Departmental Board. He stated that if that outcome was not satisfactory, he and the Chief Fire Officer intended to seek an early meeting with the Minister. He stated that only then would it be considered appropriate to issue a statement.

During discussion, Mr Ross stated that, as Chairman of the Audit Committee, he had raised concerns regarding the shortfall in funding. He reminded Members that the Authority was charged with the responsibility of protecting lives and property in Northern Ireland. He stated that to enable the Authority to deliver the level of service that was required it needed adequate funding.

He expressed concern that the shortfall in funding may mean that in certain instances the Organisation may be unable to deliver the level of service expected and lives may be lost and property destroyed. He stated in such instances the Organisation would likely be subject to adverse criticism and questioned whether the Department would support the Authority in such a situation and confirm that it had been unable to provide the Fire Authority with the funding it required.

Following further discussion, Members **agreed that, should the outcome of the Departmental Meeting be unsatisfactory, an early meeting should be sought with the Minister and, if necessary, the Chairman and the Chief Fire Officer would convene a Special Meeting of the Authority.**

Scheme of Delegation

The Chairman sought clarification on the current position with respect to the Scheme of Delegation.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the revised Scheme was currently being finalised and he anticipated it would be ready for the June Authority Meeting.

Armagh Business Case

The Chairman sought clarification regarding the current position with respect to the Armagh Business Case.

Mr Hatch outlined his concerns and frustrations with respect to the delay in the purchase of the Armagh site due to the ongoing timeframe for the Department to approve the Armagh Business Case.

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs informed Members that a meeting was scheduled to take place on 31 May 2005 with the Department's Business Case Unit. He stated that further queries had been received from the Department and were being progressed but that he hoped any outstanding difficulties could be resolved at that meeting.

Mr Gowdy acknowledged Members' concerns and stated that he would discuss the matter with Mr A Elliott.

Attendance Management Policy Training

The Chief Fire Officer explained that, as Members were scheduled to meet on four occasions during June, arrangements were being made to co-ordinate the Attendance Management Policy training on one of those days.

2 MINUTES OF THE HUMAN RESOURCES COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held on 10 May 2005, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations contained therein adopted by the Authority, on the motion of Mr Hatch, seconded by Mrs Dixon.

Mr Hatch, Chairman of the Human Resources Committee, drew Members' attention to Item 4 of the Minutes – Review of Staffing Structures. He highlighted that the Committee had been advised of the implications of the financial constraints with respect to progressing the Consultant's recommendations.

3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE LIAISON COMMITTEE

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Liaison Committee Meeting held on 4 May 2005.

4 NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL MATTERS

Report on Meetings

The Chairman informed Members that he had attended a joint briefing facilitated by ACAS on the new negotiation procedures.

He also informed Members that he would be attending two meetings of the National Joint Council on 25 May. The issues to be discussed were Rank-to-Role and the National Joint Council which had been put in abeyance until after the election.

The Chairman pointed out that the National Joint Council was also dealing with other issues including the framework for re-deploying the money from phasing out of the long service increment to reward continuing professional development which was being progressed by the Continuing Professional Development Group.

5 CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

Visits to Stations

The Chairman reported on favourable visits to Dromore (Tyrone) and Limavady Fire Stations.

Retirement of Mrs Betty Green

The Chairman referred to Mrs Green's retirement and informed Members that the Committee Clerk, Mrs Irene Hill, would become the link to him and the Chief Fire Officer.

Fun Day – 28 May 2005

The Chairman reminded Members of the Fun Day being held in Downpatrick on 28 May 2005. The joint event was being organised by Downpatrick Fire Station and the Downpatrick & County Down Railway Society and would take place from 3.00 pm to 7.00 pm.

Visit to Central Fire Station

The Chairman reported on the Minister's visit to Central Fire Station.

Meeting of the Chairs of Statutory Bodies

The Chairman reported on a meeting of the Chairs of Statutory Bodies within the Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety.

Attacks on Firefighters

Mr Hughes expressed his concern with regard to the issue of attacks on Firefighters and sought an update on progress in addressing the issue.

The Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that the Minister's visit to Central Fire Station had been prompted by a vicious attack on Firefighters. He informed Members of Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig's excellent work at a strategic level to raise awareness regarding the issue of attacks on Firefighters.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig assured Members that the Service was engaging with the local community at all levels and explained how the Service was addressing the issue through community education in Schools through to the LIFE Scheme and also the Cadets Scheme.

He informed Members of progress on other initiatives and stated that the Service was working with the Minister and the Fire Brigades' Union to try and drive down the attacks on Firefighters.

6 CHIEF FIRE OFFICER'S REPORT

Members noted the Chief Fire Officer's Report and the Chief Fire Officer gave Members a brief overview of his Report.

He referred to the weekend of 13-15 May which had been a busy one for the Service and gave Members a brief summary of the more significant incidents attended including a serious fire in a diesel storage plant at Jonesborough, a series of gorse fires in Armagh and Down and a fire in an unoccupied abattoir in Newtownards.

The Chief Fire Officer also outlined an incident on 16 May at which the Service had provided assistance to HM Coastguard and RNLI. He stated that the incident was an example of inter-agency working and reflected the Memorandum of Understanding between the various agencies being put into practice.

At this point ,
Mr C Gowdy left the Meeting

With respect to the update on Business Cases, the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs informed Members that the Service had received an informal response from SIB with respect to the Outline Business Case.

7 OPERATIONAL MATTERS

Digital Radio Project Tetra Terminal Training

Members were informed that the Service's Radio Project Team had purchased equipment, to the value of £504,582.00, from Motorola Limited via the PSNI/ICS Contract ICS/DTRS/5. It was noted that the equipment would be delivered in a phased schedule during the 2005/2006 financial year and utilised as the new Digital Radio Scheme rolled out.

Members noted that the training requirements were not included directly in the PSNI/ICS Contract ICS/DTRS/5 as individual organisation needs would be different. Members were informed that a training needs analysis and 'Train the Trainer' courses were now required on the product range purchased from Motorola Limited.

The Authority, on the motion of Mr Bradley, seconded by Mr Hughes, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the provision of a training needs analysis and training courses by Motorola Limited at a cost of £8,333.00 and for Motorola Limited to be added to the Authority’s List of Sole Suppliers for the provision of Tetra Terminal equipment and associated services”.

8 FINANCIAL MATTERS

Payments and Receipts as compared with Estimates

Members noted that from 1 April 2005, the Department had instructed that the Fire Authority move to new monitoring arrangements and report on a Resource Budgeting basis. The Chief Fire Officer stated that no financial report had been presented but explained the new accruals based reports would be produced for the first two months of the financial year in June. Members were informed that, thereafter, reports would be produced on the normal monthly basis.

Mr Ross reiterated the concerns he had raised at the last Meeting and emphasised the need for Members to have a mechanism for monitoring the Budget and suggested that a Standing Committee monitor it on a quarterly basis

Following discussion, **it was agreed that the Director of Finance & Performance Management would make a presentation to Members on the reporting mechanism for monitoring and how mechanism could be improved.**

9 HUMAN RESOURCE MATTERS

Sickness Statistics

Members noted the Sickness Statistics for the month of April 2005 which had been circulated for information.

The Chief Fire Officer gave a brief overview of the information presented and highlighted that the statistics continued to show a downward trend. Members acknowledged the Service’s performance and noted that most of the Departments were performing under the 10-day target.

10 RELEVANT CORRESPONDENCE

There was no relevant correspondence.

11 SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

Members approved the undernoted documents for sealing:

Fire Authority for Northern Ireland with –

Safety Advice Centre Limited – provision of five NEBOSH National Certificates in Occupational Safety & Health Courses.

12 MEETINGS OF THE AUTHORITY AND ITS COMMITTEES, ETC

Members noted the list of Meetings of the Authority and its Committees scheduled for the month of June 2005.

It was also noted that the Audit Committee Meeting scheduled to take place in July had been brought forward to 21 June 2005.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 3.25 PM

ADOPTED

CHAIRMAN AT MEETING OF
AUTHORITY

CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF
EXECUTIVE

DATE : 28 JUNE 2005