

FIRE AUTHORITY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

MINUTES OF A MEETING

28 FEBRUARY 2006

2.00 PM

PRESENT: Mr W F Gillespie OBE TD MBA JP DL FCIQB FSCA,
Chairman presiding
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 K Harper MIFireE
Mr G A Hatch TFA
Mr J Hughes
Mr J F McKeever
Mr R Pollock
Mr J Ross FCA ATII

APOLOGIES: Mrs M Black
Mrs A M McAleenan
Mr O Molloy LLB

IN ATTENDANCE: Chief Fire Officer
Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Community Development)
Director of Human Resources
Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Director of Finance & Performance Management
Board Administrative Secretary

1 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 January 2006, 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.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Wholetime Recruitment

The Chairman sought an update on progress with respect to Wholetime Recruitment.

The Director of Human Resources informed Members of the positive outcome of the recruitment exercise highlighting that a new intake of Trainees would be commencing on 1 March 2006.

The Chairman welcomed this progress and expressed his appreciation.

Update on Economic Appraisals – Cars and Vans

The Chairman sought an update with respect to the Economic Appraisal for Cars and Vans.

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that the Phase 2 of the Business Case had been forwarded to DHSSPS and a response was still awaited. He assured Members that Assistant Chief Fire Officer Wright was monitoring progress.

Members noted that, in order to ensure service delivery in the interim, the Chief Fire Officer, within the delegated limits, had authorised the purchase of some cars and vans.

In response to concerns expressed by Mr Hatch regarding the ongoing timeframe associated with the Business Case, the Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that Phase 1 of the Business Case had been approved. He reiterated that Phase 2 of the Business Case was currently with the Department. Mr Hatch asked if there was anything the Authority could do to emphasise to the Department the need to progress the Business Case.

The Chairman acknowledged the concerns raised and explained that the issue of Business Cases would be discussed later in the Meeting.

Educationalist

Referring to the Authority's strong views regarding the post of Educationalist, the Chairman sought an update on progress.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig explained that no decision would be taken regarding the post until Officers were aware of the financial position for next year.

2 MINUTES OF THE STRATEGY, PLANNING & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Strategy, Planning & Resources Committee held on 28 February 2006 were circulated at the Meeting. After an interval to allow Members to read the Minutes, they were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations contained therein adopted by the Authority, on the motion of Mr Harper, seconded by Mr Pollock.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Training Centre Business Case

Mr Bradley, Chairman of the Strategy, Planning & Resources Committee, emphasised that a fully operational training centre was essential to any Service. He stated that the Training Centre Business Case had had been forwarded to the Department at the end of November and Members of the Strategy, Planning & Resources Committee were concerned regarding the lack of progress.

Mr Hatch stressed the need for progress and questioned whether it would be worthwhile seeking a meeting with the Minister.

The Chairman reminded Members of the various directions the Training Centre Business Case had taken over the last number of years and also expressed concern regarding the ongoing timeframe given that the Department's Business Case Unit had been involved in the development of the current Business Case from the outset. He referred to contact with the Department the previous day and stated that he had been assured a response would be forwarded within the next two weeks.

Following further discussion, the Authority, on the motion of Mr Harper, seconded by Mr Pollock, unanimously resolved that a meeting with the Minister should be sought if approval for the first stage of the Training Centre Business Case was not received within two weeks. Such a meeting would include two other Authority Members, in addition to the Chairman.

3 REPORT FROM REMUNERATION COMMITTEE

At this point,
the Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig,
Director of Human Resources, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs and
Director of Finance & Performance Management
left the Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 7 February were circulated for the information of Members along with a memorandum from the Remuneration Committee to Authority Members in relation to a review of the remuneration package for the post of Chief Fire Officer.

Following a full discussion, the Authority, on the motion of Mr Bradley, seconded by Mr Hatch, unanimously resolved to revise the salary for the post of Chief Fire Officer from 1 April 2006 to £123,783. The Chairman agreed to make the necessary submission to the Department.

At this point,
Mr McKeever left the Meeting and
the Chief Fire Officer, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig,
Director of Human Resources, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs and
Director of Finance & Performance Management
re-joined the Meeting

4 NATIONAL JOINT COUNCIL MATTERS

Report on Meetings

The Chairman informed Members that a meeting had been held with the Fire Brigades' Union on 25 January. He stated that there had been open discussion on a number of subjects including the new constitution and pensions. He added that the Employers had expressed their support in that they were against the proposed changes for members of the existing Pension Scheme. The Chairman explained that it had been agreed to hold similar meetings in the future.

The Chairman gave Members an overview of the business discussed at a meeting held on 6 February which had included the 2007 wage negotiations, Continual Professional Development and Co-Responder.

Referring to Circular EMP/1/06, the Chairman gave Members a brief synopsis of the current position with respect to Co-Responder Schemes and the intention to seek a resolution to this matter through legal proceedings. He informed Members that Employers had been asked to meet a proportion of the costs and explained that as the date for receipt of responses had been 21 February, the Chief Fire Officer had committed the Authority to pay a portion of the costs.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that, on the basis of the Authority's continuing support with regard to the ongoing legal proceedings in respect of the Retained issue, he believed the Authority would also wish to support this matter. Members agreed.

Mr Hughes expressed concern regarding the ongoing costs associated with the Retained case which had now progressed to the House of Lords. He enquired as to the costs to date in relation to the matter of Retained Firefighters and the application of the Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations. The Chairman asked the Director of Finance & Performance Management to ascertain costs to date.

The Chairman answered Members' questions in relation to various issues being discussed at national level.

National Employers' Circulars

Members noted Circular EMP/1/06 – Co-Responder Schemes which had been circulated since the last Meeting of the Authority.

5 CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

Rank to Role

The Chairman informed Members that NIFRS had moved from Rank to Role with effect from 1 February 2006. He listed the new roles from Firefighter through to Chief Fire Officer.

NIFRS Band

The Chairman informed the Meeting that the Band was progressing well and reminded Members that the Band would welcome invitations to perform at functions.

Visits to Fire Stations

The Chairman reported favourably on his visits to Portadown and Dungannon Fire Stations.

Chairman's Lunch

The Chairman informed Members of a lunch which he had hosted on 3 February 2006.

Graduation – LIFE Scheme

The Chairman stated that he had attended Graduation Ceremonies for the LIFE Scheme at Strabane and Westland and reiterated his support for this very worthwhile Scheme.

Conference

The Chairman informed Members of a CPA Conference he had attended in England.

Joint Negotiating Committee Meeting

Members were informed that a Meeting of the Joint Negotiating Committee had been held on 21 February.

The Chairman highlighted that the issue of the Northern Ireland Allowance had been raised and reminded Members that agreement had been reached to phase out the Allowance. He explained that the Fire Brigades' Union had asked the Authority to reconsider its position in relation to the Allowance.

The Authority re-affirmed its position and its intention to proceed with a further reduction of the Northern Ireland Allowance on 1 April 2006.

Advertisement – New NIFRS Board

The Chairman informed Members that an advertisement for the new NIFRS Board would be published that week.

6 CHIEF FIRE OFFICER'S REPORT

The Chief Fire Officer gave Members a brief overview of his Report which was noted. He stated that road traffic collisions still continued to cause concern and emphasised that NIFRS would continue to work with its partner agencies to educate young people with regard to road safety.

Members noted some examples of fires attended where the smoke alarm battery had been removed. The Chief Fire Officer pointed out that NIFRS continued to emphasise the need to fit a smoke alarm and also the need to ensure the smoke alarm was maintained. He highlighted a Community Development initiative – Home Fire Safety Checks – would be launched at the end of March.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig gave Members a brief overview of the initiative and answered Members' questions.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA)

The Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that the Audit Commission in England had carried out a CPA exercise on all Fire & Rescue Services in England in 2005. Members were informed that the Audit Commission was an independent body responsible for ensuring that public money was spent economically, efficiently and effectively, to achieve high quality local services for the public. The Commission visited every Fire & Rescue Service in England and reported on their current performance. Members noted the Executive Summary of the Audit Commission report which had been circulated for information.

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that NIFRS was aware of the exercise in England and had embarked on a self assessment exercise using the EFQM Excellence Model facilitated by the Northern Ireland Quality Centre, to conduct a similar exercise in Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service. He stated that areas of good practice from the Audit Commission report had been extracted and were being applied within NIFRS particularly as we continue the self assessment exercise.

The Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions with regard to the self assessment exercise. He explained that it was hoped to have the exercise completed by the end of April and that the early findings would be incorporated within the Priorities and Targets document which would be presented to the Strategy, Planning & Resources Committee in April.

7 FINANCIAL MATTERS

Monthly Management Accounts

Members noted the Monthly Management Accounts for the period ending 31 January 2006. The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed overview of the information presented.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that he and the Chief Fire Officer had held a useful meeting with financial representatives from DHSSPS regarding next year's budget.

The Chairman sought clarification regarding funding for pensions in the future. The Director of Finance & Performance Management outlined plans for a separate Pensions accounts from next April.

Changes to Accounting Policies & Procedures

The Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that the Department had issued a revised 2005/06 Capital Accounting Manual (CAM) for the purpose of providing guidance on the treatment of Capital issues. He gave Members a brief overview of the suggested changes to NIFRS Accounting Policies and Procedures which had been circulated to Members for information. He stated that the changes, as undernoted, would simplify the Organisation's capital accounting procedures:

- In accordance with DHSSPS Capital Accounting Manual, change the de minimis capitalisation threshold to £5,000, effective from 1 April 2006.
- In accordance with DHSSPS Capital Accounting Manual, annual indexation of Fixed Assets using DHSSPS indices and professional valuation every 5 years by VLA, effective from 1 April 2006.
- As a result of changes to the Financial Memorandum, to open a new '7 Day' Deposit account with our current Bankers, with immediate effect.

The Authority, on the motion of Mr Hatch, seconded by Mr Campbell, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the proposed changes as detailed above”.

8 HUMAN RESOURCE MATTERS

Sickness Statistics

Members noted the Sickness Statistics for the month of January 2006 which had been circulated for information. The Director of Human Resources gave Members a brief overview of the Statistics. She highlighted that the lost time rate for Wholetime Riders had consistently fallen and stated that it was one very tangible result of the work ongoing in the background.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, extended congratulations to those staff involved with attendance management.

9 RELEVANT CORRESPONDENCE

There was no relevant correspondence.

10 SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

Members approved the undernoted documents for sealing:

Fire Authority for Northern Ireland with –

Channel 56/Visionworks – for the provision of Media Training Courses; and

Hunter Apparel Solutions Limited – for the purchase of Navy Fleeces and Shirts.

11 MEETINGS OF THE AUTHORITY AND ITS COMMITTEES, ETC

Members noted a list of Meetings of the Authority and its Committees for the month of March 2006.

Members were informed that the Safety Committee Meeting scheduled to take place on 14 March 2006 had been postponed. The Meeting was now scheduled to take place on Monday, 24 April 2006.

Referring to the Discipline Committee Meeting scheduled to take place on 2 March, the Director of Human Resources explained that the legal representatives of the individual concerned had requested a postponement.

Following discussion, the Authority agreed to a short postponement and requested that the Discipline Committee set a new date.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.35 PM

ADOPTED

CHAIRMAN AT MEETING OF
AUTHORITY

CHIEF FIRE OFFICER/CHIEF
EXECUTIVE

DATE : 28 MARCH 2006