

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

22 JANUARY 2008

2.00 PM

PRESENT: Mr W F Gillespie, Chair presiding
Mr C Lammey, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive
Mr J Beattie
Mr P Bradley
Mr J Campbell
Mr S Clarke
Mr A Hatch
Mrs B Gilliland
Mr R Pollock
Mrs P Tally

APOLOGIES: Mr K Harper
Mr J McKeever

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr L Jones, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Ms A Conley, Director of Human Resources
Dr D Michail, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance Management
Mrs C McNally, Corporate Communications Manager
Mr J McGrath, Stores & PPE (Clothing) Manager
Mr A Colmer, Clerical Officer (Stores)
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were noted.

2 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November 2007, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mrs Gilliland, seconded by Mr Campbell.

Arising from the Minutes:

Audit Committee Meeting

The Chair sought an update regarding the additional work which NIAO would be conducting with respect to NIFRS.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that there was nothing further to report at present. He advised Members that DHSSPS would raise the question of the audit given the HMI Inspection and how much the Audit Commission in England have moved forward.

Draft Investment Strategy 2008-2018 and Draft Budget 2008-2011

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that NIFRS response had been forwarded and acknowledged the time given by the Minister to listen to NIFRS concerns during his visit on 19 December 2007.

Referring to the final budget allocation, the Chief Fire Officer welcomed the additional £14 million capital allocated to NIFRS over the next 3 years and explained that it would allow the Principal Officers and Directors to consider what now can be achieved.

A copy of the Minister for Health, Social Services & Public Safety's statement regarding the extra funding for Health was circulated for the information of Members.

The Chair referred to the issue of revenue funding and pointed out that, as yet, there had been no announcement regarding the level of revenue funding. He explained to Members that there would be further considerations should NIFRS not receive more revenue funding.

At this point,
Mr Hatch entered the Meeting

The Chief Fire Officer stated that he would await the final figures for funding.

The Chair welcomed the additional capital allocation for NIFRS but re-emphasised that unless the revenue funding improved important decisions would have to be taken.

The Chair thanked the Chief Fire Officer and his team for all their excellent work and the approach taken to achieve the allocation of additional funding.

3 Service Delivery Committee Meeting

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee held on 8 January 2008.

Mr Beattie, Vice-Chair of the Service Delivery Committee, gave Members a brief overview of the Business discussed at the Meeting.

Mr Hatch referred to the Minutes relating to Fire Safety Legislation and suggested the need for more detail in the Minutes in order to better inform those Members who are not part of the Committee. He also referred to the presentation given by Assistant Chief Fire Officer Wright on the NIFRS Command & Control System and stated that he felt such a presentation would be useful for the full Board.

The Chair reminded Members that a decision had been taken previously regarding the format of the Minutes of Meetings. Referring to the presentation on the Command & Control Systems, the Chair explained that a presentation to the full Board could be arranged.

Following further discussion regarding documents presented at Committee Meetings, it was agreed that documentation for all Standing Committee Meetings would be circulated to all Members for information.

4 National Joint Council Matters

Report on Meetings

The Chair informed Members that he had attended a meeting of the Fire Forum on 30 November. He stated that the key areas of discussion had been with respect to responses to flooding incidents, including a presentation from the Chief Fire Officer of Gloucestershire outlining his Fire & Rescue Service's response to recent flooding incidents, and proposals for the development of a Centre of Excellence at the Fire Service College.

The Chief Fire Officer gave Members a brief background to the proposal to develop a Centre of Excellence for the UK Fire Service similar to the National Police Improvement Agency. He stated that CLG hope to establish the Centre and explained that individual Fire Services would fund the Centre. Members noted that NIFRS currently pays for its use of the Fire Service College and a budget was allocated for that purpose.

Members noted that the Chair had also attended meetings of the National Joint Council on 13 December. The Chair gave Members a brief synopsis of the business discussed which had included the agreement of a pay increase for Principal Officers; Fire Officers Association – audit of Membership; launch of Joint Protocol; and 2008 pay settlement.

The Chair also informed Members that he had attended the launch of the Joint Protocol for Good Industrial Relations in the Fire & Rescue Service on 17 January. He reported positively on the launch and highlighted that the Minister for Health, Social Services & Public Safety had sent a message of support. A copy of Circular NJC/08/07 relating to the Joint Protocol was circulated for the information of Members.

The Director of Human Resources informed Members that she had been encouraged by the attendance at the launch of the Joint Protocol and explained that the Labour Relations Agency would be delivering in-house training, across the whole Organisation, on the basis of the new protocol. She further explained that NIFRS would be adopting the protocol as a model for industrial relations with other Representative Bodies.

The Chair and the Officers answered Members questions on aspects of the information presented.

5 Chair's Business

The Chair gave Members a brief account of his activities since the last Meeting of the Board and highlighted in particular the visit of the Minister on 19 December and thanked all those who had attended. He also highlighted the launch of the 999 Emergency Services Joint Charity of the Year 2008.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the launch of '999 Charity Partnership' sees a commitment by the 4 emergency services – Police Service of Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service, Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and Her Majesty's Coastguard – to raise as much money as possible for their chosen charity, Northern Ireland Cancer Fund for Children. He stated that NIFRS staff would be organising their own fundraising events as well as combining their efforts with the other emergency services for a number of joint fundraising events planned across Northern Ireland.

Mrs Tally asked that a copy of the programme of events be forwarded to Members for information.

The Chair also informed Members of a meeting with SIB regarding the slow progress with respect to the over-arching business case and explained that representatives from SIB would be in attendance at the February Board Meeting.

LIFE Scheme Graduations

Members noted a list of dates and locations of LIFE Scheme Graduations during the month of February.

Board Information Day

Members noted that a Board Information Day was scheduled to take place on Friday, 14 March with the venue to be the Training Centre.

The Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of the proposed programme for the Day. The Chair asked Members to advise himself or the Chief Fire Officer of any other topics which they felt should be included.

HMI Recommendations

The Chair explained that Mr Bradley had asked for this item to be raised under Chairman's Business.

Mr Bradley referred to the recommendations arising out of the Inspection commissioned by the Department and explained why he felt it was important that progress on the recommendations emanating from the Inspection should be retained as a standing item on the Agenda. He highlighted the key recommendations which he felt the Board should be involved in, ie, Diversity Forum, managing of absence, succession planning and Performance Management Framework.

He strongly urged the presentation of a routine report to the Board to enable the Board to monitor progress.

The Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that the HMI recommendations were captured within NIFRS Priorities & Targets Annual Plan and emphasised that the Principal Officers and Directors were working through the recommendations with other priorities. He further explained that the Priorities & Targets allowed for items to be brought forward to the relevant Committees. He assured Members that the recommendations were being progressed and stated that Members would be kept informed, through the relevant Committees, as matters become finalised.

The Chair gave Members an update on progress with respect to the issue of succession planning and work ongoing with respect to the establishment of a Diversity Forum.

The Chair sought clarification as to the timeframe for receiving a full update on progress. The Chief Fire Officer advised the Meeting that progress on all issues would be available at the end of March.

6 Chief Fire Officer's Report

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of operational activities for the months of November and December 2007, along with a synopsis of incidents of note which had occurred during that period.

Mr Hatch referred to the traumatic nature of many of the incidents attended by NIFRS personnel and sought clarification as to the most appropriate way to demonstrate appreciation of the work which is carried out at such incidents.

The Chief Fire Officer outlined to Members the very well structured debriefing process which was in place within NIFRS for all personnel. He also explained that the work of the crews was always acknowledged on the incident ground and why it was not possible to commend the crews at every incident.

Members acknowledged the process in place within NIFRS and welcomed the support available for personnel.

Management Accounts

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members an overview of the Management Accounts for the period ending 31 December 2007. He informed Members that most budgets were fairly well on target and he did not foresee any difficulties. He answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

7 Technical Presentation

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Wright explained that the presentation was one of a series of updates advising Members of progress within the Technical Development Directorate. He informed Members that Mr J McGrath, PPE & Stores Manager, was one of the Lead Officers across the UK in the field of personal protective equipment for personnel and stated that the presentation would demonstrate the great level of work carried out by Mr McGrath.

Mr McGrath informed Members of the background and work of the national Integrated Clothing Project and the associated developments in Personal Protective Clothing. He also gave Members an overview of NIFRS Corporate Image. He answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

The Chair, on behalf of the Members, thanked Mr McGrath for his comprehensive and informative presentation.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Wright acknowledged the excellent work by Mr McGrath in research and development and highlighted that Mr McGrath was widely recognised for the work which he carried out.

At this point,
Mr McGrath and Mr Colmer
left the Meeting

8 Relevant Correspondence

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members of the lobbying which NIFRS had carried out in relation to the draft Budget whereby a copy of NIFRS response and a covering letter had been forwarded to all MLAs, MPs and Councils.

Members noted letters of support from a number of MLAs and a number of Councils.

The Chair informed Members of an anonymous letter which he had received relating to Officer Standby Areas alleging that individual Officers were not adhering to the agreed policy. He explained that due to the nature of the allegations he had formally asked the Chief Fire Officer to investigate the matter.

The Chair further informed Members that the Chief Fire Officer had concluded his investigation and had found there to be no substance to the allegations and the Officers concerned had assured him that they were complying with the policy.

9 Sealing of Documents

Members approved the undernoted documents for Sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Bauer Kompressoren UK Limited – Replacement of Breathing Apparatus Cylinder Compressors;

Banbridge District Council – Permissive Path Agreement;

Capital W Properties Limited – Lease of 3rd Floor Unit, River House, Coleraine;

R G Coulter & Company Limited – Refurbishment at FRS Training Centre and BA Workshops at FRS Headquarters;

The National Trust – Conveyance of Lands at Rathlin Island;

Extraspace – Portable Buildings; and

Donnelly Bros – Leasing of Vans.

10 Meetings of the Board and its Committees

Members noted a list of Meetings scheduled for the remainder of January and for the month of February 2008.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.25 PM
