

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

15 MARCH 2011

2.00 PM

PRESENT: Dr J McKee, Chair presiding
Mr P Craig, Chief Fire Officer
Cllr D Barbour
Mr J Barbour
Mrs S Grant
Mr A Hanna
Mr M Kerr
Ald Mrs G Rice
Mrs P Tally

APOLOGIES: Cllr M Carr
Ald A Hatch
Mr C Mack

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr E Doyle, Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer
(Community Development)
Mr C Kerr, Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer
(Technical Development)
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance
Management
Dr D Michail, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Mrs H Ellis, Senior Human Resources Manager
Mrs C McNally, Corporate Communications Manager
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr N McCann, DHSSPS
Mrs H Robinson, DHSSPS
Mr D Jordan, DHSSPS
Mrs L Curran, DHSSPS
Mrs C McGuire, DHSSPS

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Chairman expressed his appreciation to the Chief Fire Officer and his Senior Officers, in particular Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer Kerr and Area Commander Ashford, for the tour of Fire & Rescue Training Centre and the excellent demonstrations which had taken place.

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were noted.

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Chairman sought clarification as to whether any Members of the Board wished to declare any potential conflict of interest with any of the Business Items on the Agenda. Members confirmed that there were no conflicts of interest.

2 Presentation by Public Safety Unit, DHSSPS

The Chairman welcomed Mr Noel McCann, Director of Personnel & Corporate Services, DHSSPS and the other DHSSPS representatives to the Meeting.

Mr McCann made a presentation giving Members an overview of the context, funding, governance and the relationship between DHSSPS and NIFRS.

In response to a question from Mr D Barbour, Mr McCann explained that there were a number of Forums at which the Department and NIFRS were represented, eg, HR Forum, Finance Directorate, etc, and which afforded opportunities to work together on issues of mutual interest. He also acknowledged that there were other opportunities for working together.

Mrs Tally thanked Mr McCann for his presentation and welcomed the Department's acknowledgment that NIFRS are working through the DID recommendations.

The Chairman and Chief Fire Officer advised Members of the continuing regular contact with DHSSPS and they welcomed working in co-operation with DHSSPS.

The Chairman thanked Mr McCann for his presentation and stated that he hoped that Mr McCann and the representatives from DHSSPS had found the tour of Fire & Rescue Training Centre and the demonstrations useful and informative.

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At this point,
Mr McCann, Mrs Curran and Mrs McGuire
left the Meeting

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3 Minutes – 22 February 2011

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 February 2011, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr J Barbour, seconded by Mr Kerr.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Assessment & Development Centres

The Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the current position informing them that he and the Senior HR Manager had met with Legal Advisers with respect to legal and contractual obligations. He explained that the legal advice was imminent.

The Chief Fire Officer also informed Members that NIFRS had responded to all Freedom of Information and Data Protection enquiries in relation to the matter and also confirmed that a letter had been forwarded to all staff concerned to advise them of the current position.

Mrs Tally referred to the potential financial implications of the anomaly and enquired as to whether there was any indication as to who would be liable.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that, whilst NIFRS was considering the possible impact of the ADC anomaly, it was difficult at this stage to specifically identify possible financial implications without having definitive legal advice with respect to legal and contractual obligations.

The Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions and acknowledged Members' concerns with regard to the potential financial implications, given the current financial climate.

The Chief Fire Officer assured Members that the Department was aware of the matter. He commended the individuals involved who have been very patient and emphasised that NIFRS was endeavouring to move the matter forward.

4 Audit & Risk Management Committee Meeting – 14 February 2011

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Management Committee Meeting held on 14 February 2011.

Audit Commission Report – Organisational Assessment of NIFRS

Referring to the discussion at the Board Meeting on 22 February 2011 and the concerns raised by Members in relation to the draft Audit Commission Report on the Organisational Assessment of NIFRS and also with respect to the number of perceived inaccuracies within the Report, the Chairman explained to Members that he had met with the Auditor & Comptroller General to outline NIFRS's concerns in relation to the matter.

He gave Members a synopsis of the points he had raised and explained that a copy of the draft Audit Commission Report had been given to the Auditor & Comptroller General highlighting the areas which NIFRS felt should be reconsidered.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members of the current position in relation to the NIAO Report. He advised that amendments had been made and that he had to make a response by 9 March 2011.

Mrs Rice pointed out that it would be useful for Members to have sight of the second draft and more importantly the final draft of the Audit Commission Report before it is published.

The Chairman stated that some of the comments within the draft Report were indefensible and emphasised that NIFRS would continue to challenge each version of the Audit Commission's Report.

Mrs Rice, Chair of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, commented further on the Minutes of the Audit Meeting of 14 February 2011 highlighting in particular the External Audit Plan and the issues in relation to Pensions. Members noted that, as yet, no response had been received to NIFRS's letter to the Department regarding the accounting of Firefighters' Pensions.

Mrs Rice informed Members that the next Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee scheduled to take place on 9 May had been postponed to 12 May 2011.

5 National Joint Council Matters

At this point,
Mrs Tally left the Meeting

Members noted that there had been no meetings of the National Joint Council since the last Board Meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that a settlement has been made in the matter of the Employment Tribunal cases brought by the Fire Brigades' Union under the Part-Time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations which covers the period July 2000 to June 2010. He explained the level of compensation which personnel may be entitled to, and added that NIFRS would have to comply as it was a National agreement. He advised Members that necessary approvals would be sought in due time.

6 Chairman's Business

A copy of the Chairman's Quarterly Review, January to March 2011, was circulated for the information of Members.

Vice-Chair

Mr Hanna referred to his tenure as temporary Vice-Chair for the period October to December 2010 and informed the Meeting that he had, quite unexpectedly, been remunerated for fulfilling the position by the Department. He stated that during his tenure it had been challenging but rewarding and thanked Members and the Senior Management Team for their support.

7 DID Recommendations

Report from DID Working Group

Mr Hanna, Chair of the DID Working Group, gave a brief update on progress since the last Board Meeting. He drew Members' attention to the previously circulated proposed NIFRS Board Committee Structure which had been considered by the Working Group.

Proposed NIFRS Board Committee Structure

Mr Hanna gave Members an overview of the considerations of the Working Group with respect to the proposed Board Committee Structure, which included membership, frequency of Meetings, etc. He also explained that the Working Group, in order to be consistent with the Board, were proposing not to have Vice-Chairs for each of the Committees.

Mrs Rice expressed her concern with respect to the proposal not to have Vice-Chairs elected for each of the Committees. She pointed out that she also felt the Board should have a Vice-Chair. Mrs Grant concurred with Mrs Rice.

Mrs Robinson, DHSSPS, explained that the constitution of the Board was set in legislation but undertook to look at the possibility of an informal position of Vice-Chair of the Board. Members welcomed Mrs Robinson's comment.

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs stated that as the constitution of the Board was a separate matter from the formation of Board Committees, therefore, there was nothing to disallow Vice-Chairs to be appointed to each of the Committees.

Mr Hanna explained that subject to amendment and agreement of the proposed Committee Structure, it was proposed to reconstitute the Committees at the next Board Meeting and that it was envisaged Members would self-nominate prior to the Board Meeting.

During further discussion, Members of the Working Group answered questions and provided clarifications on aspects of the proposed Committee Structure.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Hanna, seconded by Mrs Rice, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the proposed NIFRS Board Committee Structure subject to amendments”.

Mr Hanna highlighted that the agreement of the Committee Structure effectively completed 4 of the DID recommendations. He explained that the DID Working Group would be meeting the following week and gave a brief outline of the business for the Group.

8 Chief Fire Officer's Report

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted the difficulty in preparing his Report given the move to the third Tuesday of each month for Board Meetings but he was hopeful matters would improve for future Meetings.

Referring to the Operational Activities, the Chief Fire Officer explained that he was considering a new reporting structure and invited Members' comments/suggestions.

Members noted the Operational Activities and Incidents of Note for the month of February 2011.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members of his attendance at the launch of the Road Safety Strategy and the Consultation Strategy. He gave Members a brief outline of the proposals out for consultation.

Referring to the additional information on Road Traffic Collisions, the Chief Fire Officer highlighted the significant reduction in RTC fatalities and acknowledged the work of NIFRS in contributing to this reduction.

Contracts Awarded for the Month of February 2011

Members noted a list of Contracts awarded for the month of February 2011.

Management Accounts

The Management Accounts for the period ending 28 February 2011 were circulated for the information of Members.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed overview of the current Revenue position and advised the Meeting that the Accounts were indicating a net underspend of £1.8 million. He asked Members to consider the financial position in terms of improved value for money. He stated that the reduced level of expenditure during 2010/11 will help improve NIFRS financial performance when compared against other Fire & Rescue Services.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management answered Members' questions on the information provided.

Acknowledging Members' comments regarding staffing levels and overtime, the Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the Senior Management Team would be addressing these issues during their Strategic and Business Planning Day and that Workforce Planning would be an issue for discussion. He highlighted the need for effective financial planning allied to agreed strategic priorities for the years ahead in order to ensure NIFRS efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.

Mrs Rice commented on the current underspend in the training budget and asked that consideration be given to Equality & Diversity training in 2011/12.

9 Management Statement & Financial Memorandum

Members noted the revised Management Statement & Financial Memorandum between DHSSPS and NIFRS.

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs gave Members a synopsis of the background to the documentation which he commended adoption of the Memorandum to Members. The Officers answered Members' questions with respect to the documentation.

The Board, on the motion of Mr J Barbour, seconded by Mr Kerr, unanimously –

Resolved: **“to approve the Management Statement & Financial Memorandum between DHSSPS and NIFRS”.**

10 GD92 Business Case

Members were informed that the current GD92 Communications and Mobilising System was installed in NIFRS in 1998. The main function of the system is to process and deliver instructions to Fire Stations and Officers from a centralised Command & Control Mobilising System to mobilise the appropriate resources to emergencies.

Members noted the Executive Summary of the Business Case, which considers the options for the replacement GD92 Communications & Mobilising System, along with a report from the Director of Finance & Performance Management which has been endorsed by the Senior Management Team.

Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer Kerr gave Members a brief background to the Business Case emphasising that the GD92 Communications and Mobilising System was mission critical in terms of NIFRS service delivery. He answered Members' questions on the information presented.

In response to concerns raised by the Chairman in relation to funding, the Chief Fire Officer stated that this project was a priority for NIFRS given that the GD92 replacement was Service critical and he would be highlighting this to DHSSPS.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Mrs Grant, unanimously –

Resolved: **“to approve the GD92 Business Case for submission to DHSSPS”.**

11 Downpatrick District Offices Lease

Members noted a Memorandum from the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs concerning the renewal of the lease for Downpatrick District Offices at Strangford Road, Downpatrick. The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs gave Members a brief background to the matter.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mrs Rice, unanimously –

Resolved: **“to approve the renewal of the lease for Downpatrick District Offices at Strangford Road, Downpatrick, for the sum of £6,500.00 per annum to 31 August 2011”.**

12 Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

Letter from Peter Twogood acknowledging NIFRS response to Executive Draft Budget.

13 Sealing of Documents

Members approved the undernoted documents for Sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Down District Council – Renewal of Lease for Downpatrick District Offices, Strangford Road, Downpatrick; and

Smiths Detection – Raman Identifiers.

14 Meetings of the Board and its Committees

It was noted that the April Board Meeting was scheduled to take place on 19 April 2011 at 2.00 pm.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.40 PM
