

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

17 MAY 2011

2.00 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Mr J Barbour

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Kerr, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Mr D Ashford, Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer
(Community 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 D Jordan, DHSSPS

The Chairman congratulated Ald Rice, Cllr Barbour, Cllr Carr and Ald Hatch on their success in the recent Council Elections.

1 Apologies

Apologies were noted.

2 Declaration of Interests

The Chair 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.

3 Minutes – 19 April 2011

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 April 2011, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Carr, seconded by Mrs Rice.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Assessment & Development Centre Update

The Chief Fire Officer gave Members an update on the current position explaining that NIFRS was currently seeking legal advice with regard to releasing the legal opinion received regarding the ADC anomaly to the Representative Body.

The Meeting acknowledged the need for NIFRS to move forward on this matter.

4 Minutes of Special Board Meeting – 19 April 2011

The Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 19 April 2011, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Mr Mack.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Remuneration Committee

Members noted that the membership of the Remuneration Committee shall be the Chairman of the Board, who is also Chairman of this Committee, and the Chairmen of the Finance, Human Resources and Service Delivery & Performance Committees, plus one other Board Member. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer/Chief Executive is not a Member of this Committee.

Members were reminded that the approval of the membership of the Remuneration Committee had been deferred until all the above Standing Committees had elected a Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

Membership of the Committees was circulated for the information of Members. Members noted that Mr M Kerr had been elected Chairman of the Finance Committee, Mr A Hanna Chairman of the Human Resources Committee and Ald A Hatch Chairman of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee and were consequently Members of the Remuneration Committee along with the Chairman of the Board.

The Chairman stated that the Board was required to elect one other Board Member to serve on the Remuneration Committee and proposed Mrs Tally.

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

Resolved: **“to approve the membership of the Remuneration Committee and that Mrs P Tally be elected to serve on the Committee”.**

Joint Negotiating Committee

Members noted that the membership of the Joint Negotiating Committee shall consist of the Board Chairman, Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and the Chairmen of Finance, Human Resources and Service Delivery & Performance Committees and representatives nominated by the recognised Trade Union Body, namely the Fire Brigades' Union.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mr Hatch, noted and approved the Board Membership as listed above and approved it accordingly.

5 Reports from Board Committees, including approval of Committee Minutes

Audit & Risk Management

Members were informed that at the Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, held on 12 May 2011, Ald Mrs Rice had been elected Chairman of the Committee.

Mrs Rice highlighted that the Committee dealt with a lot of Business and gave Members a brief overview of the Business discussed at the Meeting. She drew Members' attention in particular to the Committee's recommendation that Cllr D Barbour be appointed to represent the Board on all matters relating to Business Continuity Planning.

The Chief Fire Officer gave Members an outline of the role of the Board's representative as NIFRS moves towards BS 25999 Certification – the Business Continuity Code of Practice.

Mrs Rice advised the Meeting that Mr Barbour would be reporting back to the Audit & Risk Management Committee.

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

Resolved: “to approve the nomination of Cllr D Barbour to represent the Board on all matters relating to Business Continuity Planning”.

Finance

Members were informed that at the Meeting of the Finance Committee, held on 10 May 2011, Mr Kerr had been elected Chairman of the Committee.

Mr Kerr gave Members a brief overview of the Business discussed at the Meeting which had included the Budgets 2011/12 and updates in respect of Omagh and Rathfriland Fire Stations. He also informed Members of the annual review of the charges NIFRS makes for Special Services and Hire of Equipment. The Board noted that the Finance Committee had recommended approval of the revised Fees and Charges.

Service Delivery & Performance

Mr Hatch, Chairman of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee, gave Members an account of the Business discussed at the Service Delivery & Performance Committee Meeting held on 10 May 2011. The Business had included a presentation by the Chief Fire Officer on the Annual Business Plan, a look forward to 2011/12 and an overview of Operational activities over the Easter and Bank Holiday period.

Mr Hatch paid tribute to the work of all NIFRS staff during the period of Easter and the Bank Holiday for their response to the unprecedented operational activity.

The Chairman informed Members that he had the opportunity to attend a major incident with the Chief Fire Officer. He expressed his appreciation to the Principal Officer team, operational personnel, Regional Control Centre staff and also Support staff. He acknowledged the work which had already been commenced by Finance staff in collating information regarding the associated costs for this period. He highlighted that although it had been a period of unprecedented operational activity costs were still 50% less than the same period last year.

The Chairman also expressed his appreciation to the Corporate Communications Manager and her staff for their outstanding work during this period.

Human Resources

Mr Hanna, Chairman of the Human Resources Committee, gave Members a synopsis of the Business discussed at the Meeting held on 17 May 2011. He explained that recruitment was an issue for NIFRS and that there was a very challenging schedule for moving forward. He also explained that the Corporate Management Team were considering ways to streamline the recruitment process especially with respect to Wholetime recruitment.

He also informed Members that a Work Plan for the Committee had been discussed and the following priorities agreed –

- Retained Issues;
- ICT Issues (current HR systems); and
- DID Recommendations, in particular Strategic Review of HR.

Mrs Tally enquired as to whether NIFRS would be compromised in anyway given the level of vacancies within the Organisation. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that whilst NIFRS was not compromised currently, it would reach a critical point with the projected retirements. He assured Members, however, that NIFRS would not compromise service delivery.

Mr Kerr referred to the number of personnel fulfilling roles in a temporary capacity and asked if there would be recruitment to fill posts permanently.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer outlined progress attained with respect to agreeing an interim solution for Assessment & Development Centres which would enable NIFRS to move forward with appointments and promotions.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that consideration had been given to ADCs for junior ranks and pointed out that NIFRS needed to recruit trainee Firefighters to facilitate promotions. He referred to the ADC anomaly and explained that a failure to agree in this matter would preclude NIFRS from moving forward.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer highlighted good work which had been completed with respect to Operational Tests of Competence, ie, 296 personnel including Regional Control Centre complete and Watch Commander Tests commenced.

Mrs Rice stated that the Committee had also raised concerns with respect to the issue of the recruitment of Support staff and considered it a risk to the Organisation.

Mr Mack acknowledged that concerns had been raised by the Committee and added that the Members of the Human Resources Committee had been satisfied that steps were being taken to move forward.

6 Chairman's Business (including National Joint Council Matters)

Trainee Firefighter Graduation Ceremony

The Chairman congratulated the Chief Fire Officer on the recent Trainee Firefighter Graduation Ceremony which had been an excellent day. He referred to the graduation of a female Firefighter and stressed the need for NIFRS to continually promote NIFRS as a career for females.

Members' Appraisal Forms

Members noted that this was progressing.

Disclosure of Compensation

The Chairman referred to letters which had been circulated to Members regarding Disclosure of Compensation in respect of information NIFRS was proposing to publish in its Annual Report.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members an explanation regarding the information to be presented. He also explained that Members had an option to opt out of disclosure but that he would encourage Members who are covered by the disclosure requirements to allow the disclosure of compensation payments.

In light of queries raised by Members, the Chairman asked that the matter be included on the Agenda of the June Board Meeting. In the meantime, Members should raise any concerns with him or the Director of Finance & Performance Management.

Mileage

The Chairman informed the Meeting that DHSSPS had reached an agreement in respect of the Chairman's home to work mileage.

Operational Assurance Audits

The Chairman reminded Members of his guidelines with respect to Members' attendance at Station Audits and stressed that Members should not become involved in operational matters.

Mr Carr acknowledged the commitment of personnel on the ground during the spate conditions but expressed concern regarding comments he had received in relation to issues such as feeding on the fireground and rest periods.

The Chief Fire Officer assured Members that there were procedures and processes in place to deal with such matters during protracted incidents. He pointed out that personnel were asked to return to Station/stand-down but very often personnel remained committed to the incident.

In response to a question from Mr Kerr, the Chief Fire Officer clarified that all frontline appliances carry first stage feeding supplies, ie, water and energy bars.

Mrs Tally referred to the discussion at the Service Delivery & Performance Committee and reiterated the Committee's thanks to the Service for its response to the spate conditions. She enquired about a debrief and whether there was anything NIFRS could do better.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer would be meeting with the Area Commanders and seeking feedback.

National Joint Council

The Chairman informed Members that a meeting of the National Joint Council was scheduled to take place on 14 June 2011.

Position of Vice-Chairman of the Board

The Chairman reminded Members that he proposed to invite Members to elect a Vice-Chairman at the June Board Meeting.

7 Chief Fire Officer's Business

Members noted the Chief Fire Officer's Report for April 2011 which included Operational Performance, Prevention Performance, Organisational Performance and Financial Performance.

Operational Performance

Discussion took place with respect to operational performance during April specifically in relation to the volume of gorse and wildfire incidents, delivery of fire safety messages and media coverage. Members noted media coverage had been positive with NIFRS Officers receiving high commendation from the public on their professional response.

Mrs Tally referred to the impact on service delivery of the high volume of calls relating to gorse and wildfire incidents and asked for the level of cross-departmental working. The Chief Fire Officer highlighted ongoing work between NIFRS and partner agencies regarding this matter and also with regard to community education, etc. He informed Members that NIFRS had held a Wildland Conference involving partner agencies. He gave Members some background to the Conference and its purpose and Members noted that there would be a follow-on from this earlier Conference.

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Meeting that NIFRS had dealt with the spate conditions whilst dealing with business as normal and had fully met its statutory obligations to the community of Northern Ireland.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of Gold Command key operational decisions taken during the period in order to provide the best cover to protect the community and the environment. He pointed out that at one stage, 61 out of 68 Stations were deployed. He also referred to the resilience of the fleet during the period and paid tribute to the Transport Manager and his staff for ensuring that NIFRS fleet was maintained.

Prevention Performance

Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave Members an update on progress with respect to community education. He highlighted that in relation to the Road Safety Strategy, an electric van was being made available to the "Driving Change" Project to assist with the transportation of RTC equipment for training purposes in the cross-border region.

The Chief Fire Officer in reference to the above stated that he was also currently considering an opportunity for sponsorship in relation to NIFRS Community Education and Road Safety.

Financial Performance

Members noted that NIFRS Revenue Budget for 2011/12 was £81.4m and that detailed information on allocations for the Budget 2011/12 had been presented to the Finance Committee at its Meeting on 10 May 2011.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management circulated draft 'Month 13' Management Accounts for the period ending 31 March 2011 and gave Members a brief explanation of the information presented. He stated that Management Accounts for April are not normally reported to the May Board Meeting.

With respect to the Year-End Accounts, the Director of Finance & Performance Management outlined the current position and Members noted good progress was being made.

Mrs Rice enquired as to the impact of the high volume of gorse and wildfire incidents on the budget. The Director of Finance & Performance Management circulated additional information comparing year-on-year activity during the period March to 12 May 2011. He highlighted that whilst there had been a very high level of activity over the Easter and Bank Holiday period, there had been less activity as compared to the same period in the previous year. He assured Members that NIFRS had sufficient funding to deal with the volume of activity.

Contracts Awarded – April 2011

Members noted a list of Contracts Awarded for the month of April 2011.

Draft NIFRS Strategic Planning Objectives 2011-2012

The Chief Fire Officer circulated the draft NIFRS Strategic Planning Objectives for 2011-2012 for the consideration of Members. He advised Members that the draft Plan would be presented to the June Board Meeting for consideration and approval.

8 Standing Items

Report from DID Working Group

Mr Hanna, Chairman of the DID Working Group, gave the Meeting an update on the progress attained with respect to the DID recommendations.

Members noted that a meeting of the DID Project Programme Board was scheduled to take place on 14 June 2011.

Review of NIFRS Standing Orders

Members noted revised NIFRS Standing Orders, circulated for the consideration of Members and Mr Hanna drew Members' attention to the key amendments to the document from the last Board Meeting.

Mr Barbour expressed concern regarding Standing Order 2.2.4 relating to the appointment of Members of District Councils. The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs explained that the content of this Standing Order had been a direct quote from The Fire and Rescue Services (NI) Order 2006.

Following discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mr Hanna, seconded by Mr Kerr, unanimously –

Resolved: **“to approve the revised NIFRS Standing Orders subject to minor amendments”.**

At this point,
the Chief Fire Officer left the Meeting

9 Standalone Strategic Items

There were no Items tabled for discussion.

10 Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

- Letter of appreciation from a member of the public in relation to the recent gorse fires.

11 Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for Sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Marsh Limited – Insurance for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012; and

AJC Electrical – Network Cabling Services for a period of 2 years from date of Contract Award.

12 Any Other Business

There was no other Business.

13 Meetings of the Board and its Committees

The Chairman referred to discussions with regard to moving Board Meetings back to the fourth Tuesday of each month, with Meetings commencing at 1.30 pm.

Members agreed and noted a list of suggested revised dates of Board Meetings for the remainder of 2011 and 2012.

Members noted a Schedule of Meetings with respect NIFRS Board Committees for the month of June 2011.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.10 PM
