

# NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

## MINUTES OF A MEETING

22 FEBRUARY 2011

2.00 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Ald Mrs G Rice

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T Wright, Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer  
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  
Mrs H Robinson, DHSSPS

### 1 Apologies

Apologies were noted.

Prior to the commencement of Business, 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.

### 2 Minutes – 25 January 2011

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 January 2011, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, subject to a minor amendment, on the motion of Mrs Tally, seconded by Mrs Grant.

Arising out of the Minutes:

### **Assessment & Development Centres**

The Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the current position explaining that the independent third party review of the Assessment & Development Centre anomaly had been completed and he had received a report the previous day. He stated that the anomaly may impact on some individuals.

Members were informed that the Chief Fire Officer and Senior HR Manager would be meeting Legal Advisers with respect to legal and contractual obligations. He undertook to keep the Board advised of the outcome and the potential impact on NIFRS.

-----

At this point,  
Mr Hanna entered the Meeting

-----

Referring to the outcome of the legal advice, Mrs Tally requested that the information be brought back to the Board for consideration prior to any decisions being made with regard to compensation, etc.

The Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions in relation to his update.

The Chair assured Members they would be kept informed of progress.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that a letter would be forwarded to all staff concerned to advise them of the current position.

-----

At this point,  
Mr Hatch entered the Meeting

-----

### **Enniskillen Fire Station**

Members were informed that efforts to resolve the very sensitive issue of the Enniskillen Memorial Montage were ongoing.

In response to a question from Mr Hatch, the Chief Fire Officer assured Members that the local Firefighters were fully engaged in the efforts to reach a locally acceptable solution to the issue.

The Chair informed Members that he would be meeting Mrs Foster MLA and Mr Gault to assure them of NIFRS efforts to find a solution to the issue.

### **3 Notes of Audit & Risk Management Workshop – 3 February 2011**

Members noted the Notes of the Audit & Risk Management Workshop held on 3 February 2011. The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that the Workshop had been convened to consider NIFRS Board Committee structure, one of the recommendations emanating from the Delivery & Innovation Division Report on the Review of NIFRS. He added that the Report had recommended the establishment of separate Human Resources and Finance Committees.

Members noted that the Audit & Risk Management Committee had agreed in principle the outline of NIFRS Standing Committees as –

Audit & Risk Management Committee;  
HR Committee;  
Finance Committee;  
Service Delivery & Performance Management Committee; and  
Remuneration Committee.

The Equality & Diversity Forum would continue in its present format.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that the proposed structure would serve the needs of the Board and meet the requirements of the DID Report. He reminded the Board that there were staffing issues involved in servicing the various Board Committees along with all the additional governance issues highlighted by the DID Report.

Mrs Grant, Vice-Chair of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, stated the review of the NIFRS Board Committee structure was work in progress. She stated that the Committee were aware of the need to consider the issue of resourcing any new Committee structure.

Members noted that a paper on the proposed Committee structure along with Terms of Reference and Business Agenda would be presented for consideration and approval by the Board.

### **4 Audit & Risk Management Meeting – 14 February 2011**

Mrs Grant, Vice-Chair of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, gave Members a verbal report on the Business discussed at the Meeting held on 14 February 2011. She highlighted that the Northern Ireland Audit Office representative had been most complimentary of the work of NIFRS Internal Audit Unit.

Matters arising from the Meeting:

#### **Audit Commission Report**

Mrs Grant informed Members that under Any Other Business the representative from the Northern Ireland Audit Office had raised the Audit Commission Assessment of NIFRS. She explained that the representative had outlined the rationale for conducting the Assessment which had concluded that overall NIFRS provides an effective response to emergencies, however, the prospects for future improvement are poor. Mrs Grant invited Mr J Barbour and the Chief Fire Officer to comment.

Mr J Barbour expressed his dissatisfaction that the Northern Ireland Audit Office were commenting on a draft report which the Board had not seen. He expressed concern on the negative tone of the report in relation to NIFRS and the performance of the new Board, especially given the Board was only very recently in place.

A copy of the draft Organisation Assessment of NIFRS Audit 2010/11 and NIFRS response to that draft were circulated for the information of Members.

The Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that prior to the appointment of the new Board he and the Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer had flagged up that the timing of the Assessment was not ideal given the temporary status of the Principal Officer team, other vacant posts and the interim status of the NIFRS Board. He stated that NIFRS had co-operated fully in the process and he gave the Meeting a brief synopsis of the preparation undertaken by the Senior Management Team for the Audit Commission's assessment of NIFRS.

The Chief Fire Officer outlined the process following the conclusion of the assessment explaining that NIFRS had responded to the first draft report mainly with regard to factual accuracy. He referred to the document previously circulated to Members and NIFRS response which had a number of inaccuracies within the draft report. He pointed out that NIFRS's response had been copied to the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

He stated that he had been disappointed and frustrated that conclusions appear to have been reached, notwithstanding the inaccuracies within the initial draft report. He outlined his understanding with respect to the preparation of the report on the Organisational Assessment of NIFRS and expressed his disappointment that the agreed due process appeared not to have been adhered to.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the representative from the Northern Ireland Audit Office had stated that a further draft of the Organisational Assessment of NIFRS was expected by the end of the month.

The Chair referred to the overlap of the assessment with the DID Report and the assumption that NIFRS was somehow resistant to change. He stated that NIFRS needed to prove it was up for change with the Board supporting the Senior Management Team. He suggested that it may be helpful if he and the Chair of the Audit & Risk Management Committee met with the Northern Ireland Audit Office to express NIFRS's concerns regarding how the Assessment and outcome have been handled and also highlighting the Board's wishes to be actively involved in the process.

During discussion Members expressed their concerns with regard to the matter and agreed that the Chair and the Chair of the Audit & Risk Management Committee meet with the Director of the Northern Ireland Audit Office urgently in order to outline the Board's concerns in relation to the draft Audit Commission Report.

## **5 National Joint Council Matters**

This matter was reported under Chairman's Business.

## **6 Chairman's Business**

Members noted a Chairman's Log detailing his activities since his appointment on 1 January 2011 which had been circulated for the information of Members.

The Chairman gave Members a brief overview of his activities including his attendance at a National Joint Council meeting on 1 February 2011.

## **7 DID Report - Update**

Mr Hanna, Chair of the DID Working Group, gave a report updating Members on the implementation of the DID Report recommendations.

Members noted that the DID Report recommendations had been considered by the previous Board, the Interim Board and the new Board appointed in October 2010.

Mr Hanna referred to the establishment of the DID Working Group and informed Members that the Group had met on 2 February 2011 to consider the DID recommendations relating to the NIFRS Board. He explained the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs had been tasked with reviewing the information needs of the Board, bringing a schedule of information to the Board and, in the light of other work, reviewing NIFRS Standing Orders. It was noted that the Chair of the Board had confirmed that it was his intention to develop objectives for himself and Board Members.

With respect to the DID Report Project Board, Mr Hanna informed Members that the Project Board had met on 17 February 2011 to review progress. He stated that some concern had been expressed with regard to the level of progress but it was explained that corporate governance processes had to be followed. He explained that should the proposals be accepted by the Board today, it would make it possible to make substantial progress on the recommendations in the next few months. Members noted that the next meeting of the DID Report Project Board will be held in May.

A copy of the February Update on the NIFRS Review Implementation Plan was circulated for the information of Members. Mr Hanna highlighted that there were a number of recommendations which cannot be progressed as they are linked to other work, including one requiring legislative change by DHSSPS.

Mr Hanna proposed that the existing DID Working Group should continue with a wider brief of overseeing the implementation of all DID Report recommendations. Membership would continue to consist of the Chair of the Board, the Chief Fire Officer and the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs and himself. It was noted that the Working Group would report back to the Board. Mr Hanna suggested that it might also be useful to invite a representative from DHSSPS to attend meetings of the Working Group.

Members welcomed the suggestion that the DID Working Group continue and also that a representative from DHSSPS be invited to attend meetings of the Working Group.

## 8 Chief Fire Officer's Report

The Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave an overview of the Operational Activities and Incidents of Note for the month of January 2011. He referred Members to the additional information on Road Traffic Collisions which showed a downward trend in the number of RTC fatalities attended by NIFRS which reflected the sterling work carried out by NIFRS through its Road Safety Strategy.

### Management Accounts

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave an overview of the Management Accounts for the period ending 31 January 2011. He advised Members that the revenue position was indicating an underspend position. NIFRS had declared an easement of £1 million to DHSSPS in the February monitoring round so that funds can be utilised elsewhere within the wider Departmental context. He assured Members that the Finance Department would continue to monitor the position closely and liaise with Budget Managers to minimise any year-end underspend.

The Chair acknowledged that NIFRS was coming through a period of transition which explained a degree of caution with regard to funding issues. However, he stated the importance of maintaining a close monitoring on finance in the future.

The Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that he was moving forward with the Senior Management Team and the Area Commanders to lead change management within the Organisation.

Discussion took place with regard to the potential impact of the budget allocation for the next CSR period 2011-2015 and the Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that it was hoped NIFRS would be advised of its indicative budget within the next couple of weeks.

### Retirement – Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer

The Chief Fire Officer referred to the impending retirement of the Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer and personally thanked Mr Wright for all his work over the last 33 years. He extended his best wishes to Mr Wright for a long and happy retirement.

The Chair concurred with the Chief Fire Officer's comments and paid tribute to the regard in which Mr Wright was held. On behalf of the Board, he also extended their best wishes to Mr Wright on his retirement.

-----

At this point,  
the Chief Fire Officer left the Meeting

-----

## **Contracts Awarded for the Month of January 2011**

Members noted a list of Contracts awarded for the month of January 2011. Officers answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

### **9 Relevant Correspondence**

There was no relevant correspondence.

### **10 Sealing of Documents**

Members approved the undernoted documents for Sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Sunlight Services Group – Framework Agreement for Management of Firefighters' PPE; and

Belfast International Airport Limited – Lease Agreement for the provision of "Real Fire" Training Site Area.

### **11 Meetings of the Board and its Committees**

It was noted that the next Meeting of the Board would be held at FRS Training Centre on 15 March 2011 and that a brief timetable would be circulated to Members for information.

Mr Carr suggested that a visit to the Regional Control Centre would be useful to Members. It was agreed that a visit to the Regional Control Centre would be arranged to coincide with the April Board Meeting.

### **Forthcoming Elections**

Summary Guidance on the forthcoming elections was circulated for the information of Members along with Election Guidance issued by the Permanent Secretary, DHSSPS, on 17 February 2011.

---

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS  
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED  
AT 4.10 PM

---