

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

22 MARCH 2016

3.40 PM

PRESENT: Ms C McKinney, Chairperson presiding
Mr D Ashford, Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mr J Barbour
Mr A Hanna
Mr K Henning
Mr R Irvine
Mr P Martin
Mr G Smyth

APOLOGIES: Mr C Enright

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr G Thompson, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Operations)
Mr A Walmsley, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Community Protection)
Mrs L Cuddy, Director of Planning, Performance & Governance
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Finance
Mr D Moore, Director of Human Resources
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS Observer

Item 1: Apologies

Apologies were noted.

Item 2: Declaration of Interests

The Chairperson 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 apparent conflicts of interest.

Mr Hanna declared a potential conflict of interest with regard to Agenda Item 6 - Business Cases - BSO IT Shared Services - and stated that he would withdraw from the Meeting when this item came through for discussion.

With regard to Paragraph 21 of the Code of Accountability for Board Members, the Chairperson noted that Mr Enright would be required to formally declare or not any conflicts of interest at the next Board Meeting.

At this point,
Mr Martin joined the Meeting

Item 3: Minutes – 26 January 2016

The Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 26 January 2016, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Smyth seconded by Mr Henning.

Matters arising from the Minutes:

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 17 December 2015

The Chairperson advised Members that the Working Group established to look at the matter of Confidentiality and consisting of Mr Smyth, the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance would be taking this matter forward after Easter. The Chairperson stated she would take a report on progress back to the June Meeting.

Schedule of Future Meetings

The Chairperson referred to the Directors' briefings, which had originally been scheduled to take place on 23 February 2016. These had to be postponed due to other Board business. She informed the Members that the remaining induction briefings would follow when she had discussed same with the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer.

Item 4: Reports from Board Committees, including Adoption of Committee Minutes

The Chairperson reminded Members of the new process for the presentation and approval of Committee Minutes.

Service Delivery Committee - Minutes – 11 February 2016

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee held on 11 February 2016 were noted.

Mr Barbour, Chairman of the Service Delivery Committee, gave a brief overview of the key business discussed by the Committee and also the recommendations emanating from the Meeting. He proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be approved by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Irvine.

Recommendations

- Approval to carry out a review of the current provision of CADs within NIFRS;
- Approval of revised Partnership arrangements subject to a minor amendment; and
- Continuation of the Day Crewing Pilot Scheme in Enniskillen.

Special Resources Committee – Minutes – 26 January 2016

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 26 January 2016 were noted.

Mr Henning, Chairman of the Resources Committee noted the key business discussed at the Meeting and proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be approved by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Barbour.

Recommendations

- Approval to confirm voluntary severance for the Caretaker based at Newtownards Fire Safety Centre; and
- Approval to confirm voluntary severance within RCC for Employee 2.

Resources Committee – Minutes – 11 February 2016

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 11 February 2016 were noted.

Mr Henning, Chairman of the Resources Committee, gave a brief overview of the key business discussed by the Committee. He proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be approved by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Barbour.

Recommendations

- Approval of next phase of RDS Recruitment Plan with flexibility for the Director of HR and Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Operations) to amend intake for individual Stations as required depending on the establishment, strength and availability levels at the time appointment;
- Approval of NIFRS Organisational Change Policy for Operational Personnel subject to any changes following S75 consultation;
- Approval of NIFRS Miscellaneous Leave Policy Suite subject to any changes following consultation; and
- Approval of NIFRS Transport & Engineering Services Strategy 2015-2020.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 18 February 2016

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee held on 18 February 2016 were noted.

Mr Smyth, Chairman of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, briefed Members regarding the key issues considered by the Committee as follows:

- Audit of Travel & Subsistence – noted the Committee's concern that Internal Audit had provided limited assurance given that the previous audit had also been limited. Mr Smyth explained that NIFRS do not have a Travel & Subsistence Policy in place but noted that a draft Policy had now been developed. He stated that the Corporate Management Team had, however, given assurance that there were procedures in place. Mr Smyth stressed the importance of having a Policy in place.
- Audit of Community Protection – highlighted, that while Internal Audit had provided limited assurance, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Walmsley had robustly challenged their findings. Mr Smyth stated that this was another example of NIFRS failing a first audit with BSO and emphasised that NIFRS should be better prepared so that it does not keep failing.

- Business Improvement Plan – Mr Smyth explained that there were Priority 1 issues from 2008 and yet there appeared to be a lack of urgency to address recommendations. He further explained that a Business Improvement programme had been put in place to address/progress all recommendations. He noted the need for resources and skills to ensure progress and that NIAO had picked up on this and that it will be included in the Assurance Statement.

Mr Smyth stressed the need for a greater sense of urgency/focus and added that in areas where limited assurance had been provided, NIFRS must make sure recommendations are addressed before being audited again.

In response to a question from the Chairperson regarding the process for commencing/progressing Internal Audits, the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance gave an explanation with respect to the 3-year rolling plan for Internal Audit, noting that the Audit Plan is agreed on an annual basis. She also noted the process for the Head of Internal Audit's twice-yearly review of recommendations and the development of the Head of Internal Audit's year-end statement.

Mr Smyth outlined his understanding regarding the Internal Audit process and referred to the preparatory work which should be undertaken. He stated the problem was NIFRS is exposed and emphasised that Priority 1 recommendations are a must do for the organisation.

Mr Smyth referred again to the Audit of Travel & Subsistence highlighting that in 2011 the issue of no policy had been flagged up; yet in 2016 only a draft Policy has been developed. He stated this was unacceptable. He pointed out that this being picked up by NIAO. He then referred to the Business Improvement Plan and noted that the matter of staffing had been raised at Board and Committee level. He commented that the Business Improvement process was only now in place yet last summer progress had been anticipated.

Mr Smyth noted that the Board met bi-monthly and explained that it may be necessary to revisit this and have monthly meetings to ensure progress/issues are addressed.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer accepted that the lack of progress was disappointing. He assured Members that the Corporate Management Team is taking the matter seriously and is working hard to address and will continue to do so.

Mr Smyth stated that the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee and Internal Audit had acknowledged the work achieved. He further stated the situation regarding the draft Travel & Subsistence Policy was not a good reflection and leaves the organisation exposed.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer drew Members' attention to the other priorities which impacted on the Corporate Management Team, such as budget planning, and reiterated that they are doing all they can to address issues.

The Chairperson, whilst accepting that the Corporate Management Team is working hard to address a number of priorities, stated that the situation was, in her view, totally unacceptable. She stated that she had faith in the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and his Team to address same. Referring to Mr Smyth's comments regarding the frequency of meetings, the Chairperson indicated that this was for another forum.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Walmsley referred to the Audit of Community Protection and explained that he had robustly challenged Internal Audit's findings. He gave Members an example and stated that NIFRS had demonstrated good faith during the audit and that the outcome was very disappointing.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance assured Members that the Corporate Management Team do challenge Internal Audit and that there is dialogue.

The Director of Finance explained to Members her risk-based approach to tasks/projects and noted her focus has been on IT matters. With respect to Travel & Subsistence, she assured Members that there are procedures in place and progressing the Policy was on her plan of work.

Mr Smyth proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be approved by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Henning.

Recommendations

- Acceptance of the Audit of Travel & Subsistence and Audit of Community Protection;
- Approval of the Controls Assurance Questionnaire Outcomes 2015/16 for Land, Building & Non-Medical Equipment; Information Management; Fire Safety; and Fleet & Transport Management;
- Approval of the Quarter 3 Progress Update on the Corporate Business Plan and Balanced Scorecard.

Remuneration Committee – Minutes – 26 January 2016

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 26 January 2016 were noted. Mr Hanna gave a synopsis of the business discussed and proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be approved by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Martin.

Recommendations

- Approval to confirm voluntary severance for the Caretaker based at Newtownards Safety Centre; and
- Approval to confirm voluntary severance within RCC for Employees 1 and 2.

Item 5: Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed the Meeting that she had nothing to report.

Item 6: Strategic Standalone Items Finance Report

Members noted a Briefing Paper providing an update on the financial position as at 29 February 2016.

The Director of Finance drew Members' attention to the projected RRL Financial Outturn for the year ended 31 March 2016 noting that a net underspend of £158k is projected. She explained that NIFRS Revenue breakeven position is 0.25% of the RRL. She stated that NIFRS is aware that the remainder of 2015/16 will be difficult and the Corporate Management Team is committed to achieving a revenue breakeven position by 31 March 2016. She assured Members that the Corporate Management Team will continue to closely monitor the financial position and advised that she had also been in contact with DHSSPS.

The Director of Finance gave Members a brief overview of the Budget contingency.

Referring to the 2016/17 budget allocation, the Director of Finance informed Members that NIFRS had received correspondence from DHSSPS indicating a budget reduction of £1.05m representing 1.5% reduction from the 2015/16 opening allocation. She noted that clarification was still awaited with regard to 2 key pressures on the budget, ie, National Insurance and pension contributions.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer stated that the £1.05m budget reduction would be difficult but manageable.

The Director of Finance highlighted that NIFRS is required to respond to DHSSPS by 8 April. She advised Members that the Corporate Management Team was collating a response and sought clarification as to the approvals process for same in the timeframe. The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer suggested that the draft response be forwarded to DHSSPS with the caveat that it was a draft response and was subject to Board approval.

The Chairperson stated that the Board was scheduled to meet on 11 April and suggested that the draft response be presented to the Board at that Meeting. Mr Millar (DHSSPS Observer) indicated that this would be appropriate. It was, therefore, agreed that the draft Savings Plan be presented to a Special Board Meeting on 11 April 2016.

Pension Issue

A briefing paper updating Members with respect to the treatment of Temporary promotions was noted.

The Director of Finance gave an overview of the information presented explaining that it is recommended that the proposed implementation date of 1 April 2016 be stayed to allow time to complete the consultation process and review the issues raised and that a further update paper be presented to a future Board Meeting with proposals for consideration.

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

Resolved: “to agree that the proposed implementation date of 1 April 2016 (for new promotions/secondments undertaken from 1 April 2016 not to be treated as pensionable) be delayed to allow further time to complete the consultation process and review the issues raised; and that a further update paper, with proposals, be brought back to a future Board Meeting.”

Scale of Charges

Members noted a revised Scale of Charges reflecting the annual increase.

The Director of Finance explained that the percentage increase is based on Table 36 (All Costs) from the Office of National Statistics.

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

Resolved: “to approve the revised Scale of Charges for 2016/17 effective from 1 April 2016”.

Business Cases

Property Services Division Framework

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the delivery of Estates Measured Term Contract and Estates Maintenance Services.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance outlined the purpose of the Business Case and explained that with the preferred option NIFRS would be joining a collaborative framework. She explained that it is the view of the Corporate Management Team that the Property Services Division Framework will complement the proposed Estates structure.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance answered Members’ questions regarding aspects of the information presented.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Irvine, seconded by Mr Smyth, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the delivery of Estates Measured Term Contract and Estates Maintenance Services”.

At this point,
Mr Hanna left the Meeting

BSO IT Shared Service

The Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the BSO ITS Shared Services was noted.

The Director of Finance noted the purpose of the Business Case explaining that it addressed the provision of BSO ITS providing a managed IT infrastructure service.

The Board, on the motion of Ms McKinney, seconded by Mr Henning, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for BSO ITS Shared Service”.

SOC Downpatrick Lease

At this point,
Mr Hanna re-joined the Meeting

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Strategic Outline Case for the continuation of the lease for Downpatrick District Offices.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance gave Members an explanation regarding the regularisation of leases and outlined the need for NIFRS to continue to lease premises in Downpatrick. She advised Members that the Business Case for a new Station in Downpatrick was with DHSSPS and noted that continuation of the current lease was the preferred option.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Strategic Outline Case for the continuation of the lease for Downpatrick District Offices”.

In response to an enquiry from Mr Henning, the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance updated Members on the current position with regard to a new Fire Station in Downpatrick.

SOC Cookstown Lease

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Strategic Outline Case (SOC) for the continuation of Cookstown District Offices.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance gave an overview of the purpose of the SOC and the preferred option.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Strategic Outline Case for the continuation of the lease for Cookstown District Offices”.

Provision of Motor Insurance

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the provision of Motor Fleet Insurance.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that it was proposed that NIFRS join a collaborative framework for the provision of Motor Insurance. She provided a detailed overview of the Summary of Need and the options considered. She noted the preferred option is Option 4 and outlined that clarification is currently being sought with regard to the issue of employee passengers. She further explained that pending legal advice, NIFRS can move to Option 3.

The Chairperson noted that Option 4 was the preferred option with the caveat that it may be Option 3 pending legal advice.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Martin, seconded by Mr Smyth, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the provision of Motor Fleet Insurance”.

Additional Item of Business – Larne Fire Station

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer outlined the background to an incident at Larne Fire Station on Saturday, 5 March 2016 and updated Members on the current position.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer informed Members of the damage to the Station and explained that the Station was considered too unstable to remain operational until further assessment so Station personnel are responding from temporary accommodation. He highlighted that no service had been lost at any stage and this was testament to personnel. He also commended Estates staff for all their work to ensure service was maintained.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer reported on a visit to the Station the previous week and stressed the onus to deal with the matter as quickly as possible. He noted that the Area Commander was compiling an internal report and highlighted that he and the Principal Officers will continue to ensure presence. He stated that he would keep Members informed.

The Director of Finance updated Members on the financial implications and discussions with DHSSPS.

During discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions regarding the matter. Members expressed their appreciation for the work of personnel on the ground and NIFRS response to ensure service was maintained. The Chairperson asked that the Board's thanks be conveyed to all staff concerned.

Item 7: Routine Correspondence

There was no routine correspondence.

Item 8: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted document for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with Hallmark Solutions Limited for the provision of an E-Recruitment Solution for NIFRS.

Item 9: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future meetings.

The Chairperson reminded Members that a Special Meeting had been scheduled for 11 April 2016 at 10.00 am.

The Chairperson thanked colleagues for their attendance and the Officers for their reports. She extended best wishes to everyone for Easter.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING ENDED
AT 5.15 PM
