

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

22 SEPTEMBER 2009

2.00 PM

PRESENT: Mr W F Gillespie, Chair presiding
Mr C Lammey, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive
Mr P Bradley
Mrs B Gilliland
Mr K Harper
Mr R Pollock
Mrs P Tally

APOLOGIES: Mr J Campbell

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr L Jones, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Mr P Craig, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Community Development)
Mr T Wright, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Technical Development)
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance Management
Mrs U McCambridge, Corporate Communications Officer
Mr G Somerville, Station Commander (Business Continuity
Co-Ordinator)
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr B Kennedy, DHSSPS
Mr P McStravick, Delivery & Innovation Division, DFP
Mrs P Wilson, Delivery & Innovation Division, DFP
Mr B McLernon, Delivery & Innovation Division, DFP

The Chair welcomed Mr P McStravick and the other members of the Comprehensive Review Team to the Meeting.

1 Apologies

Apologies were noted.

Change in Order of Business

It was agreed that Item 3 - Contingency Planning – Swine Flu – arising out of the Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 21 July 2009 - be taken as the next Item of Business.

Contingency Planning – Swine Flu

At the Special Board Meeting held in July 2009, Members asked for a presentation detailing NIFRS Contingency Plans for Swine Flu.

The Chief Fire Officer gave Members a brief background to Business Continuity Planning and introduced Station Commander G Somerville to the Meeting. He gave Members an overview of Station Commander Somerville's role as NIFRS Business Continuity Co-Ordinator.

Station Commander Somerville gave the Meeting a presentation detailing NIFRS Contingency Planning for Swine Flu.

At this point,
the Deputy Chief Fire Officer entered the Meeting

Station Commander Somerville answered Members' questions in relation to the information presented.

The Chair thanked him for his presentation and stated that it had been very helpful.

At this point,
Station Commander Somerville left the Meeting

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 June 2009, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Bradley, seconded by Mrs Tally.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Remuneration Committee

The Chair referred to the Comprehensive Review and informed the Meeting that the Review was well underway with Members having noted the Terms of Reference prior to its commencing.

Statutory Annual Accounts

The Chair reminded the Meeting that Members had suggested the need for NIFRS to reconsider its position on the issue of NIFRS commencing new entrants on band minima of the relevant scale. The Director of Human Resources was to consider the matter.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to an Equality Pay Briefing from the Equality Commission on Starting Pay and advised Members that the Equality Commission was cautioning Organisations about moving away from band minima. He explained that the Director of Human Resources would consider the Equality Pay Briefing and advice received from NILGA and prepare a briefing paper for Members' information.

Remuneration Committee Meeting

The Chair informed Members that the Pay Remits considered by the Remuneration Committee had been subsequently approved by DHSSPS and DFP and had been implemented.

Review of Action Plan

Referring to the outstanding action point pertaining to Job Evaluations being conducted by Belfast City Council, the Chair sought clarification on the current position.

The Chief Fire Officer outlined progress to date and that a Business Case for the provision of Job Evaluations was currently being prepared.

National Joint Council Matters

At the June Meeting, Members had been advised that the Lead Employers had met to discuss the 2009 pay settlement and had agreed an offer of 1.25%.

The Chair explained that, in anticipation of the offer of 1.25% being accepted by the FBU, the Remuneration Committee had given approval for the required Pay Remits to be forwarded to the Department upon receipt of the formal notification of the 2009 pay settlement.

The Chair explained that the Department were requesting that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee be convened in order to formally approve the Pay Remits in respect of the pay settlement.

The Chair outlined his frustrations in regard to the matter and sought Members' approval, under Standing Order 10, to adjourn the Board Meeting in order to convene a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee.

Members unanimously agreed to adjourn the Board Meeting in order to convene a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee.

At 2.50 pm
the Meeting was adjourned

the Meeting reconvened
at 3.10 pm

3 Minutes of Special Meeting

The Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 21 July 2009, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Pollock, seconded by Mrs Gilliland.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Legal Advice on Repayment

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Meeting that legal advice on repayment had been received at the end of the previous week. He suggested that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee be convened to consider same.

Review

This was reported at Item 2.

O'Brien Pension Issue

At this point,
Mr Kennedy left the Meeting

The Chair informed Members that the Panel of himself, Mrs Gilliland and Mr Bradley, appointed by the Board to reconsider the decision made by the Chief Fire Officer in relation to the O'Brien Pension issue, had met on 3 occasions. A copy of the Panel's Report was circulated for the information of Members. The Report set out the Panel's decision, on behalf of the Board, that the late Firefighter O'Brien be deemed on duty at the time of death.

The Panel Members emphasised that they had given detailed consideration to the matter and recommended that a policy pertaining to the issue of travel be developed.

Members welcomed the Panel's decision and the Panel Members answered Members' questions in relation to same. During discussion, Mr Harper expressed concern in relation to some of the wording of the Panel's decision and the Chair explained that the wording had been agreed by the Panel. Members noted the Panel's decision.

Following further discussion regarding the development of a policy relating to travel, Members highlighted the need for clarification on the matter and the Chair asked the Chief Fire Officer to consider the matter. In response to a suggestion from the Chief Fire Officer, it was agreed that the Panel would meet to consider the issue of travel and provide input to the Chief Fire Officer.

At this point,
Mr Kennedy re-joined the Meeting

Change in the Order of Business

5 National Joint Council Matters

Report on Meetings

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

The Chair explained that the meeting scheduled to take place with the Retained Firefighters' Union on 8 September had been postponed. He informed Members that the next NJC meeting would be held on 29 September 2009.

4 Committee Membership

Members noted proposals for changes in the Committee membership resulting from the temporary reduction in Board Members from 12 to 8 (including Chair and Chief Fire Officer).

The Chair acknowledged that Committee Membership was a standing Item considered annually by the Board at its October Meeting. He informed Members that Mr Bradley had suggested that the matter be deferred for discussion at the October Meeting.

Mr Bradley, whilst accepting the need to address the issue of Committee Membership, highlighted that NIFRS Board Standing Orders requires the Board to review its work and Committee structure and membership in October each year.

It was agreed to defer discussion on Committee Membership to the October Board Meeting.

The Chair reminded Members that Standing Orders had been amended to reflect the agreed change in the Membership of the Remuneration Committee. Members noted that the temporary reduction in Board Members did not affect the Remuneration Committee.

The Chief Fire Officer highlighted the level of Business which needed to be considered by the Remuneration Committee and Mrs Tally proposed that a Meeting of the Committee be convened on the morning of the October Board Meeting. Mrs Gilliland seconded the proposal. It was unanimously –

Resolved: **“that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee be held at 11.00 am on 27 October 2009”.**

The Chair referred to the vacant position of Chair on the Equality & Diversity Forum and Members agreed that, as there were no Meetings of the Forum scheduled, the matter be deferred to the October Board Meeting.

6 Chair’s Business

Recruitment Procedures

Mrs Tally referred to a recent recruitment exercise for a senior post in which she had been involved and expressed her concern with regard to the process and timeframe for progressing the appointment which had resulted in a significant drop out of candidates. She stated that she felt the process had been protracted and suggested the need to review NIFRS policy and procedures on recruitment. She reminded the Meeting of previous discussions in which the need for highly qualified and experienced staff within NIFRS had been raised. She also questioned whether it was necessary to hold Assessment Centres for all vacancies.

The Chief Fire Officer undertook to raise the matter with the Director of Human Resources and report back to the next Meeting of the Board. Members asked for details relating to the costs for the provision of Assessment Centres, along with details of the contract and its duration.

The Chair stated that he believed the Board was content with the need for Assessment Centres and that the concern remained in relation to the timeframe for the filling of vacant posts.

Mrs Tally reiterated her concerns and questioned the appropriateness of Assessment Centres for all vacancies.

Chair’s Activities

The Chair gave Members a detailed account of his activities since the June Meeting of the Board.

Diary Dates

The Chair reminded Members of the following dates:

26 September 2009 – Official Opening of Armagh Community Fire Station;
8 October 2009 – NIFRS Band Concert.

LIFE Scheme Graduations

The Chair referred to LIFE Scheme Graduations at Portrush on 25 September 2009 and Kilkeel on 2 October 2009 and explained that he was unable to attend the Graduations. He asked should any Member be available to attend that they advise the Board Administrative Secretary.

7 Chief Fire Officer's Report

The Chief Fire Officer circulated the NIFRS Board Monthly News Brief, September 2009, for the information of Members.

Operational Activities

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of operational activities and incidents of note for the months of June, July and August 2009.

EFQM Submission

Members were reminded that one of the key tasks for this year in NIFRS Annual Service Plan was to review and submit an EFQM submission as NIFRS entry in the Northern Ireland Quality Awards "Steps to Excellence" programme. The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the submission was completed on time and had been submitted to the Assessor Panel for the Awards.

Members noted that the Assessor Panel will be visiting NIFRS in November 2009 to undertake the judging of the NIFRS submission and Members would be briefed in due course.

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that a copy of the submission was available for Members' information.

NIFRS Efficiencies

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that the Board had asked him to revisit NIFRS Efficiencies proposals in light of the Portstewart appliance remaining on Station. He informed Members that this had had an effect on NIFRS efficiency plan for this financial year and for next financial year. Members noted a revised NIFRS Efficiencies table.

Members unanimously approved the revised NIFRS Efficiencies Plan.

Management Accounts

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave the Meeting an overview of the Management Accounts for the period ending 31 August 2009.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management explained to Members that NIFRS had agreed to surrender £2m capital funding to DHSSPS, in respect of contingencies for swine flu, on the understanding that this money would be made available next year. He added that NIFRS budgets were currently being reviewed again following a further request from the Department.

8 Relevant Correspondence

The following correspondence was noted:

DFP – (Revised) Guidance on Acceptance and Provision of Gifts and Hospitality.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that NIFRS Guidance on Offers and the Acceptance of Gifts, Hospitality, Awards, Prizes and Sponsorship had been reviewed in light of the revised Guidance.

A copy of the revised NIFRS Guidance was circulated for the information of Members. It was agreed to defer discussion to the next Board Meeting.

9 Sealing of Documents

Members approved the undernoted document for Sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Peninsula Print – School Education Packs.

10 Meetings of the Board and its Committees

Members noted a list of Meetings, etc, of the Board and its Committees for the month of October.

The Chair reminded Members that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee would be held on 27 October 2009 at 11.00 am.

With respect to the issue of Committee Structure, the Chair asked Members to advise him in advance of any suggestions they may have.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.45 PM
