

# NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

## MINUTES OF A MEETING

22 NOVEMBER 2011

1.30 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Mr J Barbour  
Mrs S Grant

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Kerr, Deputy Chief Fire Officer  
Mr E Doyle, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Safety Services)  
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance  
Management  
Dr D Michail, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs  
Mrs A Davidson, Head of HR  
Mrs C McNally, Corporate Communications Manager  
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary  
Mr A Tohill, Health Estates Investment Group  
Mr S Lennon, HLM Architects  
Mr S Fitzsimons, Capital Projects Manager  
Ms G McMaster, DHSSPS

### 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 New Omagh Fire Station – Design Review Presentation

The Chief Fire Officer introduced Mr S Fitzsimons, NIFRS Capital Projects Manager, Mr A Tohill, Health Estates Investment Group, and Mr S Lennon, HLM Architects, to the Meeting and invited them to give their presentation on the new Omagh Community Fire Station Design Review.

Mr Fitzsimons informed Members of the current position with respect to progressing the new Omagh Community Fire Station project highlighting that all consultees had agreed that the Scheme was acceptable and advising of the current position with respect to planning permission for the Scheme.

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At this point,  
Mr Hatch entered the Meeting

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Mr Tohill provided Members with a brief background to structure within Health Estates Investment Group and their involvement in the project.

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At this point,  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Doyle entered the Meeting

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Mr Lennon gave the Meeting a detailed overview of the Design Review for the new Omagh Community Fire Station explaining why the current Omagh Fire Station and District Headquarters were being replaced on a shared site and the key benefits of the new build Station and District Headquarters which includes the provision of robust operational resilience in the West; enhanced training facilities for the delivery of top class services; provision of a motivational working environment for NIFRS staff; enhanced accessibility for emergency response and provision a Best in Class facility for the promotion of community wellbeing.

The Officers and Design Team answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the presentation including future-proofing, sustainable development, the proposed training facilities and links with NIFRS Community Safety Strategy.

Mrs Rice raised a number of comments in relation to the design concept highlighting in particular her concerns with regard to the cost of the project, community access and the civic centre design approach.

Mr Lennon explained to Members that the Design Team had considered other new builds on the mainland ensuring that NIFRS had sound benchmark for comparison. He further explained that the Quantity Surveyors had quality assured the costs and had indicated that the project proposal was affordable.

In response to Mrs Rice's concerns regarding the community access concept of the new project, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Doyle pointed out that Armagh Community Fire Station had a similar facility which is extensively used by the community and which also linked with NIFRS Community Safety Strategy. He stated that there was clear evidence to support community facilities and emphasised that he was content with the arrangements to manage the community access within the proposed new Omagh Community Fire Station.

Mrs Tally welcomed the design and a new build within Western Area and had no doubt that the facilities would be used by the community. Mr Hatch also commented positively on the design of the new Station.

The Chairman, whilst expressing appreciation for the work which had been completed in respect of the project, referred to the £3m in-year budget reduction and stressed that NIFRS had a responsibility for sustainability and to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland received the best possible fire and rescue service.

The Chairman thanked the Design Team for their attendance and presentation.

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At this point,  
Messrs Fitzsimons, Tohill and Lennon  
left the Meeting

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#### 4 Minutes – 25 October 2011

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

#### ***Amendment - Item 9 – Sealing of Documents***

Additional paragraphs to be added as follows:

*“Referring to the contract pertaining to flexi-officer rapid response vehicles, Mr Kerr questioned the suitability of the vehicles in responding to incidents in severe weather conditions and also to incidents such as flooding. Mr D Barbour concurred and suggested the need for NIFRS to consider a mixed profile for its rapid response vehicles.*

*The Chief Fire Officer, whilst acknowledging Members’ comments, referred to current position with respect to capital rationing and also reminded Members of the protracted timeframe for obtaining approval for the Business Case for rapid response vehicles. He stated, however, that NIFRS will continue to consider its fleet profile.”*

Arising out of the Minutes:

#### **Assessment & Development Centre Update**

The Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the current position with respect to the Assessment & Development Centre anomaly.

**Reports from Board Committees, including adoption of Committee Minutes  
Human Resources Committee – Minutes – 21 October 2011  
Vacant Senior Posts**

Referring to the vacant Senior posts, the Chief Fire Officer explained that the Job Description for the post of Director of Human Resources was currently with Belfast City Council for Job Evaluation. He also informed Members that the paperwork for the post of Director of Safety Services was being finalised and he was hopeful the post would be advertised very soon.

**Chairman's Business  
*Event in December***

The Chairman reminded the Meeting that the Board would host an informal reception on 20 December 2011 at 1.00 pm at which Members would have an opportunity to network and meet with staff representatives from across the Organisation.

Members noted that a Board Meeting would be convened at 12.00 noon that day in order to conduct essential business.

**Enniskillen Memorial Montage**

The Chairman reported on the peaceful demonstration at Enniskillen Fire Station on 27 October 2011 and advised Members of a letter of protest which Mr Gault hand delivered at the demonstration.

**Chief Fire Officer's Business –  
Contracts Awarded for the Month of October 2011**

Mrs Rice referred to the discussion at the previous Meeting regarding the approval of contracts and commented on the lack of progress with respect to a revised Scheme of Delegation. She also commented on the value of Contracts Awarded as contained within the Board papers.

Mrs Rice suggested that the Board set the limits of contracts approval within the Scheme of Delegation and proposed that, given the make-up of its membership, the Remuneration Committee scrutinise contracts of £30,000 and above.

The Chairman pointed that it had been agreed that within the revision of the Scheme of Delegation a reference would be included concerning the delegation of contract approvals and this was being progressed, however, no agreement regarding those limits had been reached at the last Meeting.

The Chairman acknowledged that in terms of governance, Members had concerns with regard to contract approvals and their accountability for funding and were keen to exercise and share that responsibility.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management suggested that the Officers consider the Scheme of Delegation set by DHSSPS in conjunction with the volume and various bands of contracts awarded within NIFRS and prepare a paper for Members' consideration.

**Following further discussion, it was agreed that a proposal for the delegation of contracts for approval by the Board would be presented to the next Board Meeting.**

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At this point,  
Mrs Rice left the Meeting

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## **5 Reports from Board Committees, including adoption of Committee Minutes**

### **Finance Committee Minutes – 17 November 2011**

The Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting held on 17 November 2011 were circulated at the Meeting.

Mr Kerr, Chairman of the Committee, stated that the Meeting had been an open and positive Meeting. He gave Members an overview of the key Business discussed, which had included Management Accounts, overtime costs, Finance Performance Indicators, long-term sickness and CSR Budgets.

He stated that the main issue that the Committee discussed was the effective control and management of expenditure. He further stated that a key issue was planning and Members had agreed the need for draft budgets and the draft Corporate Plan needed to be brought to the Board early in the New Year. Members had also noted the need for the timely development of Business Cases.

With respect to the current investigation regarding overtime claims, Mr Kerr expressed concern in relation to the lack of communication in this matter and stressed the need for Members to be made aware of any such investigations in a timely manner.

Mr Kerr informed Members that the indicative cost of long term sickness was discussed and the Committee noted that this needed to be controlled and reduced particularly in relation to one particular case of long-term absence.

Mr Kerr reiterated that the Meeting had been positive but emphasised the necessity of effective control and management of expenditure and the need for budget-holders to be held to account.

The Chairman reminded the Board Meeting that NIFRS were dealing with legacy issues which were impacting on expenditure profiles such as the level of temporary posts across the Organisation currently. He noted that these posts needed to be filled substantively and that work was ongoing to progress uniformed promotions which in turn would impact on the training budget. He acknowledged the work of the Corporate Management Team in progressing such issues.

Noting that the next Meeting of the Finance Committee not being scheduled until February 2012 and the concerns raised in relation to expenditure, Mr Mack sought clarification as to what monitoring measures would be put in place in the interim. The Director of Finance & Performance Management drew Members' attention to the fact that Financial Performance was reported at each Board Meeting. The Chief Fire Officer also assured Members that the Corporate Management Team closely monitors budgets. He further advised Members of work which was ongoing with SIG to resolve/address issues with respect to the profiling of capital expenditure.

During further discussion on budget profiling and underspends in capital, Members expressed their frustration that funding was allocated for projects such as Omagh prior to having received planning permission. Whilst acknowledging that the reprofiling of capital to other projects had addressed slippage in projects such as Omagh, Members reiterated the need for the Board to have early sight of draft Business Cases and associated budgets.

Mr Hanna referred to the capital budget and indicated that he was not aware of NIFRS capital projects for the year and suggested that this would be useful information for Members.

The Chairman acknowledged the need for information to be presented to Members in a timely manner and reiterated the need for the Board to be considering the draft Corporate Plan early in the New Year.

Arising out of the Minutes:

### **CSR Budget Letter**

A copy of NIFRS response to DHSSPS CSR recurrent budget reduction tabled at the Finance Committee Meeting was circulated at the Board Meeting for the information of Members.

The Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting held on 17 November 2011 were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations contained therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mr Carr.

## **6 Chairman's Business**

### **Chairman's Activities**

The Chairman gave a synopsis of his activities since the last Meeting of the Board. He reported on a recent visit to meet the Crew at Crossmaglen and referred to a brief visit to view the progress at Rathfriland Fire Station.

### **Board Membership**

The Chairman explained that he felt that as the Board did not have a Chartered Accountant amongst its membership he would be raising, with the Permanent Secretary, the possibility of the Board co-opting an appropriately qualified person to provide additional assurance.

## **Fraud Investigation**

The Chairman outlined his concerns in relation to how an ongoing fraud investigation within the Organisation had been portrayed in a negative manner in the media. He stated that NIFRS had acted appropriately in the matter with due process being followed. He further stated that such instances of internal 'whistleblowing' to the press were inappropriate and unacceptable and undermined the professionalism of the Service.

The Chief Fire Officer concurred with the Chairman's comments and added that the Corporate Management Team will not tolerate such actions especially given the policies and procedures in place to raise such matters. He commended the work of the Corporate Communications Manager and her team in dealing with the matter.

## **7 Chief Fire Officer's Business**

At this point, Mrs Tally asked that the matter of NIFRS budget response be discussed prior to the Chairman leaving the Meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that a letter had been forwarded to DHSSPS and outlined the background to the development and preparation of NIFRS response which had included discussions with DHSSPS. Members noted a copy of the letter which had been previously circulated.

Members further noted that the £3 million revenue reduction will have a significant impact on NIFRS in terms of the service it will be able to deliver over the next 3 years and the Chief Fire Officer explained that, as directed by the Minister, the revenue reductions, where possible, do not impact on frontline services. He gave Members a brief overview of areas where a reduced service could be provided and the implications of same acknowledging that these in the main were Retained centric with an impact on NIFRS Community Safety Strategy.

Mrs Tally referred to the sequencing of the letter which had been forwarded to DHSSPS on 16 November 2011 and tabled at the Finance Committee on 17 November 2011 for the information of Members only. Mrs Tally stated that she and the other Members of the Committee were concerned with the contents of the letter hence Mr Kerr had requested that it be tabled at today's Board Meeting for the information of all Members.

Mrs Tally indicated that she remained uncomfortable with the contents of the letter and expressed her concern that the rural community was being disproportionately disadvantaged as the focus of the letter was on Retained personnel. She reiterated that the proposals identified will leave rural areas disadvantaged.

Mrs Tally noted that DHSSPS appeared content with NIFRS proposals but questioned whether the Board as a whole was content. She expressed her concerns at the lack of involvement of Members in the process and also the lack of assurance that there were no other options available to the Board.

Mr D Barbour recognised the work involved in preparing the response to the DHSSPS budget reduction which had far reaching implications and, whilst acknowledging the leadership and guidance provided by the Chief Fire Officer, concurred that it would have been useful for the Board to have assisted in preparing that response.

The Chairman noted Members' comments and reminded Members of the background to the preparation of NIFRS response which had been completed in a limited timeframe, even with the extension he had requested. He explained that he considered NIFRS' response to be a working document and suggested the need to convene a Special Meeting to specifically discuss the matter.

The Chief Fire Officer noted Members' concerns and assured the Meeting that he too was uncomfortable with the contents of NIFRS response. He welcomed the suggestion of a Special Meeting in order for the Board and the Corporate Management Team and to consider the £3 million recurrent reduction in NIFRS revenue budget.

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At this point,  
the Chairman left the Meeting and Mr Hanna, Vice-Chairman,  
chaired the remainder of the Meeting

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During further discussion, the Officers provided Members with further information on the implications of the proposals contained within the letter and also in relation to the impact of NIFRS IRMP proposals, Retained availability and changes to crewing models, etc.

Mr Hatch pointed out the need for the Board to consider the matter strategically at a Special Meeting but stressed the need for further information to be provided to Members in order to consider the matter fully.

Mr Hanna, Vice-Chairman, noted Members' comments with respect to the need to convene a Special Meeting. **It was agreed a Special Board Meeting to discuss the recurrent budget reduction to be convened.**

The Report on the Chief Fire Officer's Business for the month of October 2011 was noted.

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At this point,  
Mrs Tally left the Meeting

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## **Organisational Performance - Draft NIFRS Customer Service Standards**

Members were informed of NIFRS commitment to a process of continual improvement and as a part of that process had carried out a review of its existing Customer Service Standards. Members noted the draft NIFRS Customer Service Standards which would undergo a 12-week consultation period commencing in December 2011.

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

**Resolved:** “to approve the draft NIFRS Customer Service Standards.”

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs asked Members to forward any final comments by 30 November 2011.

## **Contracts Awarded – October 2011**

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

The Director of Finance & Performance Management referred to the Single Action Tender Contract and explained that the value of the Contract was approximately £5,000 and not £15,000 as indicated in the paperwork.

## **8 Standing Items**

### **DID Recommendations – Update from DID Project Board Meeting**

Mr Hanna referred to the meeting of the DID Project Board held on 8 November 2011 and stated that the meeting had been positive highlighting that a majority of the DID recommendations had now been addressed.

## **9 Standalone Strategic Items**

### **Bank Mandate**

The Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that Finance had received the BACS submitted for all relevant payments for the 18 month period April 2010 to September 2011 and, as a result, were proposing the following changes:

- Wholetime Salaries increase from £1.7 million to £2 million – due to the recruitment of new Trainee Firefighters for January 2012 and;
- Wholetime Salaries, Wages and Caretakers Salaries level to be reduced from £2.752 million to £2 million.

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

**Resolved:** “to approve the changes to the Bank Mandate as outlined above”.

## 10 Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

- (a) RFU Newsletter, October 2011; and
- (b) Letter of appreciation from Omagh District Council following NIFRS attendance at flooding incidents.

## 11 Sealing of Documents

There were no documents for sealing.

## 12 Any Other Business

### **Additional Responsibility Allowance Payments**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer referred to the approval by the Remuneration Committee, and subsequently the Board, for the payment of outstanding Additional Responsibility Allowance Payments and informed the Meeting that DHSSPS approval for the payment of the Allowances had been received.

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

**Resolved:**                **“to give final approval for the payment of outstanding Additional Responsibility Allowances as approved by DHSSPS”.**

## 13 Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a Schedule of Future Meetings of the Board and its Committees.

Members were informed that a Meeting of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee would be held on 29 November 2011.

It was further noted that Meetings of the Remuneration Committee and Human Resources Committee will be held in January 2012, dates to be agreed.

Members were reminded that a short Board Meeting would be held on 20 December 2011 at 12.00 noon.

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THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS  
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED  
AT 4.40 PM

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