

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

23 JUNE 2009

2.00 PM

PRESENT: Mr W F Gillespie, Chair presiding
Mr C Lammey, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive
Mr P Bradley
Mr J Campbell
Mr S Clarke
Mrs B Gilliland
Mr A Hatch
Mr R Pollock
Mrs P Tally

APOLOGIES: Mr J Beattie
Mr K Harper
Mr J McKeever

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr L Jones, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Mr T Wright, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Technical Development)
Ms A Conley, Director of Human Resources
Dr D Michail, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance Management
Miss U Devlin, Corporate Communications Officer
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr B Kennedy, DHSSPS

1 Apologies

Apologies were noted.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 May 2009, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Hatch, seconded by Mrs Gilliland.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Remuneration Committee

The Chair referred to the Principal Officers' Pay Review and advised Members that the Terms of Reference for the Review had not, as yet, been received. He explained to Members that the Board would not be consulted regarding the Terms of Reference, it would only be sent copies of the Terms of Reference for information.

Mr Hatch sought clarification regarding the timeframe for the Review, given that completion of the Review had been anticipated before the summer break but was now October. The Chair stated that at the Accountability Review Meeting the Department had stated that completion of the Review was now likely to be October. He further stated that he had received no further information on the matter or the Terms of Reference. The Chair explained that the matter had been discussed at the Remuneration Committee Meeting that morning and it had been agreed that he would seek specific details regarding the Terms of Reference and the timeframe.

Presentation by Deputy Secretary, DHSSPS

The Chair reminded Members that Ms Brown had clearly stated that any decisions taken by the Board would be subject to the Minister's final approval. He informed Members that during the Accountability Review Meeting, the Department had reiterated this point and the need to keep the Minister informed of matters and also of the need for his views to be sought.

Referring to Portstewart, the Chair emphasised to Members that the Board's decision of 27 January 2009 still stands for the record but in light of the Minister's and the Department's views the second appliance was still on the run and incurring expenditure. He reminded Members that the matter had been left open for the Board to return to in the future and stated that the performance of the second appliance would continue to be monitored.

Audit Committee Meeting

Mr Bradley referred to the Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on 27 April 2009, in particular NIFRS Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan. He proposed that the Board approve the revised NIFRS Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan. Mr Campbell seconded the proposal. The Board unanimously –

Resolved: **“to approve the revised NIFRS Fraud Policy and Fraud Response Plan”.**

3 Audit Committee Meeting

The draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on 15 June 2008 were circulated at the Meeting for the information of Members.

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Mr Campbell, gave Members a brief synopsis of the Business discussed at the Meeting. He highlighted that the current position with respect to the Recommendations Database had been reported and informed Members that good progress had been attained.

Members noted that the Statutory Annual Accounts had also been discussed and Mr Campbell highlighted that the external Auditors had expressed their appreciation for the assistance they had received during their audit. He explained to Members that there would be a qualification on the Accounts from the Comptroller & Auditor General in relation to the overpayment made to the Non-Uniformed Directors. Members noted that the Audit Committee recommended to the Board the approval of the Financial Statements.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Statutory Annual Accounts

Members noted the draft Financial Statements for the period ended 31 March 2009 which had been reviewed by the Audit Committee on 15 June 2009.

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At this point,
Mr Clarke entered the Meeting

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The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed overview of the Annual Accounts highlighting the salient points. He also advised Members of the key points arising out of the Management Letter.

Members expressed concern at not having had sight of the Management Letter or the report of the Comptroller & Auditor General. The Director of Finance & Performance Management highlighted that the documents had been presented to the Audit Committee and added that copies of the documents could be made available to the Meeting.

The Chair suggested that discussion be deferred and copies of the documents be arranged for Members to consider later in the Meeting. The Director of Finance & Performance Management left the Meeting to organise copies of the Management Letter and Report of the Comptroller & Auditor General.

Mr Hatch referred to the Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on 15 June 2009 and sought clarification regarding the establishment position within the Internal Audit Unit. Mr Campbell and the Chief Fire Officer explained that the successful candidate had declined the offer of the position and there had been no reserve candidate on this occasion.

Mr Bradley referred to discussion which had taken place at the Remuneration Committee Meeting that morning regarding the issue of NIFRS commencing new entrants on the band minima of the relevant scale. During further discussion, Members suggested the need for NIFRS to reconsider its position on this matter. The Chair asked the Director of Human Resources to consider the matter.

4 Remuneration Committee Meeting

The Chair gave Members a verbal report of the Items of Business discussed at the Remuneration Committee Meeting held that morning. He highlighted in particular that, in accordance with the new protocols, the Committee had approved Pay Remits for submission to the Department and had also noted that 7 new requests for a Job Evaluation had been submitted.

5 Review of Action Plan

Following a letter from the Permanent Secretary dated 28 January 2009 to the Chair, the Board held 2 Workshops on 3 March and 31 March 2009. A special Sub-Committee of the Board, under the chairmanship of Mr Bradley, also met on 2 occasions on 10 and 16 March 2009.

The Chair reminded Members that the Board, at its Meeting held on 28 April 2009, agreed an Action Plan to address the matters raised by the Permanent Secretary and had further agreed to review progress on the Action Plan at its June Board Meeting.

Members noted the Action Plan and the Officers answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the information presented.

The Board noted the current position in respect of each of the Action Points and expressed concern in relation to the delay in actions to be progressed by the Department.

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs drew Members' attention to the Action Point referring to the independent review of Principal Officers' pay and expressed concern in relation to the Board not having input into the Terms of Reference of the Review and also questioned how independent the Review would be given it was being undertaken by an internal Civil Service Division.

The Chair advised the Meeting that the Principal Officers' Pay Review was now being subsumed into a Review of the whole Organisation.

At this point,
Mrs Tally left the Meeting

6 Review of Policies

The Chair reminded Members that one of the actions arising out of the Action Plan was that the Board would consider its Policies to determine if any of the Policies required review.

Members noted a list of NIFRS Board Policies, together with suggested review dates and comments. The Chair highlighted that a number of the Policies had been reviewed recently. He stated that some Policies had no review dates, such as NIFRS Standing Orders and the Code of Practice for Board Members, and explained that these may need to be considered in the future.

Members noted that the Policies would be monitored and progress reported to the Board and agreed that no other action was necessary at this time. The Chair stated that Members were free at any time to suggest a review of any of the Policies.

7 Review of Scheme of Delegation

Members noted that a further point in the Action Plan was a review of the Board's Scheme of Delegation.

The Chair explained to Members that he and the Chief Fire Officer have reviewed the Scheme of Delegation and Members noted the revised version with an amendment to specifically mention Job Evaluation.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Bradley, seconded by Mr Pollock, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the revised Scheme of Delegation”.

8 National Joint Council Matters

Report on Meetings

The Chair informed Members that the Lead Employers had met on 17 June 2009 to discuss the 2009 pay settlement and had agreed an offer of 1.25%. He stated that the offer had been made to the Fire Brigades' Union who were recommending to their membership acceptance of the offer.

The Chair advised the Meeting that at the Remuneration Committee that morning, Members had indicated that they were content for the Chief Fire Officer to submit the Pay Remit to the Department should the offer be accepted by the Union.

9 Chair's Business

The Chair gave Members a brief synopsis of his activities since the May Board Meeting.

Self Assessment Forms

The Chair reminded Members of the need to complete and return their Self Assessment Forms.

Board Meetings

The Chair advised Members that there were no Meetings of the Board scheduled for July and August but that a Meeting would be convened if the need arises. He advised the Chairs of Committee to convene Meetings of their Committees should they feel it necessary.

3 Audit Committee Meeting

Statutory Annual Accounts

Members noted the Statement of Internal Control, Report of the Comptroller & Auditor General and the Management Letter which had been circulated for the information of Members.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Campbell, seconded by Mr Pollock, unanimously –

Resolved: **“to approve the draft Financial Statements for the year ended 31 March 2009”.**

10 Chief Fire Officer’s Report

Operational Activities

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of operational activities and incidents of note for the month of May 2009.

Management Accounts

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

Corporate Communications Strategy

The Chief Fire Officer informed the Meeting that the consultation exercise in respect of the draft Corporate Communications Strategy 2009-2014 ended on 12 June 2009. He stated that 4 comments were received back following the consultation and all these had been very positive in respect of the aims and objectives of the Strategy. He highlighted that there were no changes to the draft Strategy previously presented to Members.

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

Resolved: **“to approve the draft Corporate Communications Strategy 2009-2014”.**

Action Plan

Members were aware that one of the actions allocated to the Chief Fire Officer in the Action Plan was *“to consider whether any managerial or disciplinary action is appropriate in respect of NIFRS Officers”*.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that he had considered the matter and had concluded that there were no grounds for disciplinary action against any of the 3 Directors.

Corporate Plan 2009-2014 and Annual Business Plan 2009-10

It was noted that the published Corporate Plan 2009-2014 and Annual Business Plan 2009-10 had been circulated to Members for information.

11 Relevant Correspondence

The following correspondence was noted:

National Employers' Circular EMP/03/09 – Pay Award 2009, along with a copy of the letter of offer to the Fire Brigades' Union.

The Chief Fire Officer explained to Members that a copy of the Circular had been circulated to the Remuneration Committee for information. Members noted that copies of the Circular were available.

12 Sealing of Documents

Members approved the undernoted document for Sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Cosalt International Limited – Wildland Firefighting Coveralls.

13 Meetings of the Board and its Committees

Members noted that there were no Meetings of the Board or its Committees presently scheduled for July or August but a Special Meeting will be called if the need arises.

The Chair advised the Committee Chairs that should they feel it necessary to convene a Meeting of their respective Committee to discuss same with the Chief Fire Officer.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 3.45 PM
