

# NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

## MINUTES OF A MEETING

24 JANUARY 2012

1.50 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Mr J Barbour  
Mr C Mack

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Kerr, Deputy Chief Fire Officer  
Mr E Doyle, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Support Services)  
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance  
Management  
Dr D Michail, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs  
Mrs M Hughes, Head of HR  
Mrs U McCambridge, Corporate Communications Officer  
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary  
Mr D Jordan, 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.

The Head of HR declared an interest with respect to any potential discussion relating to the recruitment of a Director of Human Resources.

Referring to the recent Special Meeting of the Special Audit & Risk Management Committee which had been held in Closed Session, Mrs Rice explained that it may be necessary for the Chief Fire Officer, the Officers and DHSSPS representative to leave the Meeting whilst she gave her report.

It was subsequently agreed to take Item 4 - Reports from Board Committees, including adoption of Committee Minutes – Special Audit & Risk Management Committee Meeting – 20 January 2012 – as the next Item of Business.

## **Change in the Order of Business**

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At this point,  
the Chief Fire Officer, DHSSPS Representative and all the Officers, with the exception of the Director of Finance & Performance Management and the Board Administrative Secretary, left the Meeting

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

#### **Special Audit & Risk Management Committee Meeting – 20 January 2012**

Mrs Rice, Chairman of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, explained that the Special Meeting had been convened to receive the Business Service Organisation's Draft Investigation Report on Overtime Claims. She gave Members a synopsis of the business discussed and the actions emanating from the Meeting.

Members noted the 'draft' status of the BSO Report and Mrs Rice explained that once finalised, the Board may wish to consider the Report in a Closed Session.

Mrs Tally sought assurance that the process put in place regarding this matter would preclude any external reviews. The Chairman explained to Members that the matter had been brought to the attention of the Director of Finance & Performance Management due to robust internal controls and NIFRS Fraud Response Plan was subsequently initiated. He also outlined the background to the instigation of the fact-finding investigation into the alleged fraudulent overtime claims.

Mr Kerr referred to the media coverage in relation to the alleged fraud investigation and enquired as to whether there would be an investigation into the disclosure of unofficial information to the media. The Chairman explained that there was no internal investigation or complaints team within NIFRS to conduct such an investigation.

Mr Kerr questioned how, as a Board, they should deal with such disclosures and the Chairman undertook to discuss the disclosure of unofficial information to the media with the Chief Fire Officer.

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At this point,  
the Chief Fire Officer, Officers and DHSSPS Representative re-joined the Meeting

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### **3 Minutes – 20 December 2011**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 December 2011, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mr Carr.

Arising out of the Minutes:

#### **New Omagh Fire Station**

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs informed Members that Planning Permission for the new Omagh Fire Station had been received on 6 January 2012.

Members noted that a Progress Update on the Omagh Community Fire Station and District Offices was contained within the Report on the Chief Fire Officer's Business.

#### **Investigation – Whistleblowing Allegations**

The Chairman advised Members of the current position with respect to the investigation being conducted by DHSSPS Internal Auditors.

#### **Post of Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Director of Safety Services)**

The Chairman informed the Meeting that the interviews for the post of Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Director of Safety Services) were imminent.

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

The Chief Fire Officer outlined the current position explaining that the third party had accepted full responsibility in the matter of the Assessment & Development Centre anomaly and there was no liability to NIFRS.

He explained that the third party had made offers of one-off compensation awards to each of the individuals concerned and have agreed a position for any future tax implications or pension liabilities. He referred to the matter of legal costs and advised Members that the third party will be reimbursing NIFRS for its legal costs.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management further explained that with respect to management costs, NIFRS had not pursued these costs in the interests of securing a final settlement.

In response to a question from Mrs Tally, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that there was a confidentiality clause in place with respect to the matter.

The Chairman welcomed the resolution and questioned whether there were any learning outcomes. The Chief Fire Officer acknowledged the need for robust quality assurance and explained how this had been built into the current Assessment Centre arrangements.

He also referred to the cost implications of outsourcing and stated that the in-house Assessment Centre arrangements were more cost-effective and job-specific.

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

##### **Service Delivery & Performance Committee Minutes – 29 November 2011**

The Minutes of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee Meeting held on 29 November 2011, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations contained therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mr Carr, seconded by Mr Hanna.

##### **Audit & Risk Management Committee Minutes – 5 December 2011**

The Minutes of the Audit & Risk Management Committee Meeting held on 5 December 2011, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations contained therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mrs Grant, seconded by Mr Hanna.

Arising out of the Minutes:

##### **Incorrect Pension Transfer Valuations**

Mrs Rice, Chairman of the Audit & Risk Management Committee requested an update on progress be given at the next Audit & Risk Management Committee Meeting and subsequent Board Meeting.

##### **Human Resources Committee Meeting – 20 January 2012**

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At this point,  
the Head of HR left the Meeting

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Members noted that a Meeting of the Human Resources Committee had been held on 20 January 2012.

Mr Hanna, Chairman of the Human Resources Committee, gave Members a synopsis of the key Items of Business discussed. He referred in particular to the matter of the recruitment of a Director of Human Resources and explained that the outcome of the desktop Job Evaluation exercise had been received but that there were some issues under discussion with DHSSPS.

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At this point,  
the Director of Finance & Performance Management and  
Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs declared an interest and left the Meeting

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The Chief Fire Officer explained that the Belfast City Council had carried out the desktop evaluation and had set the salary scale for the post at a similar scale to that which had been set when the Directors' posts had been originally reviewed subsequently giving rise to the irregular payments issue. He informed Members that he had received initial advice from DHSSPS on the matter and also advised that he would be seeking further advice from DHSSPS in regard to any potential future difficulties. He pointed out that the Human Resources Committee had strongly recommended that the advertisement for the post proceed at the new salary grade as DHSSPS intended to conduct a management review.

Members noted that the Chief Fire Officer would be following up the matter with DHSSPS and reporting back to the Chairman of the Human Resources Committee and the Chairman of the Board.

Mr Hanna outlined the concerns raised by Members of the Committee in relation to advertising with the appropriate salary scale as otherwise it may be detrimental to the level of candidate which NIFRS would wish to attract. He stated that the Officers would await the response from DHSSPS and if necessary a further Committee Meeting would be convened.

Mrs Rice stressed the importance of progressing the appointment of a Director of Human Resources and expressed her concern in relation to the ongoing timeframe and asked the matter be followed up urgently with DHSSPS.

The Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions regarding various aspects of the issue.

Mrs Tally referred to the December Meeting when the Board had been advised of the notice of retirement of another Director and queried the potential ramifications for a second Director's post. She sought clarification as to whether it was planned to appoint a Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs.

The Chief Fire Officer referred to discussion at the Human Resources Committee Meeting with regard to this matter and explained that he had asked the Committee to give him the opportunity to consider the matter and decide whether or not there was a need to fill the post. He further explained that the retirement announcement has also presented an opportunity to consider the alignment of Directorates.

Mr Hanna informed the Meeting that the Committee had also considered the Strategic Review of HR and advised Members that the Report would be considered by the Corporate Management Team and then brought back to the Board. He gave an overview of the key considerations within the Report. He emphasised that the Director of Human Resources was the key role in moving the Review forward.

During discussion regarding the Chief Fire Officer's Directorate review and the potential re-engineering of the post of Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs, Mrs Tally pointed out the importance of the business planning process and stressed the need for the right personnel to be in post given the essential need to develop and drive the Organisation's plans, etc.

Following further discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mr Hanna, seconded by Mrs Tally, requested that the Chief Fire Officer, in light of the imminent retirement of the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs, review the structure of the Corporate Management Team and present proposals to the Board.

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At this point,  
the Director of Finance & Performance Management,  
the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs and the Head of HR  
re-joined the Meeting

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## **5 Chairman's Business**

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At this point,  
Mrs Rice left the Meeting

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### **Chairpersons' Forum**

The Chairman informed the Meeting that he had recently been appointed Chair of the Chairpersons' Forum.

### **NI Chamber of Commerce**

The Chairman sought Members' views on a proposal for NIFRS to hold a corporate membership of the NI Chamber of Commerce. He gave Members a brief outline of the proposal and potential benefits of membership for NIFRS.

Following discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mr Hatch, seconded by Mrs Tally, agreed that NIFRS apply for a corporate membership of the NI Chamber of Commerce subject to Departmental approval.

### **National Joint Council Business**

Members noted that the next Meeting was scheduled to take place on 2 February 2012.

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

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

### **Prevention Performance**

The Chief Fire Officer referred to the current financial position and stated that, historically, Community Development were good at managing its spending. He explained to Members that due to the moratorium which DHSSPS had placed on advertising, approximately £500k would not be spent.

Mrs Tally referred to previous discussions regarding advertising and sought clarification on the current position with regard to advertising which had been block booked. The Chief Fire Officer stated that advertising had been block booked up to December. He added that the moratorium had caused difficulties and he was seeking clarification on the matter.

Members noted an update on Community Development activities during December. The Chairman referred to the LIFE Scheme which had been held in Ballymena and reported on his attendance at the Graduation Ceremony. He encouraged Members to attend these events, when possible, and to use the opportunities to network with visitors from outside agencies.

Referring to Fire Safety Legislation, the Chief Fire Officer gave Members a summary of progress with respect to the signing of Licensing Memorandum of Understanding.

Members noted a report on Road Safety activities during Road Safety Week 21-27 November 2011. The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Support Services) gave Members an overview of the report. He stated that Road Safety Week is an opportune time for NIFRS to make a concerted effort province-wide to highlight the consequences of road traffic collisions and drive home the road safety message to the public. Members noted the number of events which had been organised in conjunction with NIFRS Road Safety partners – DOE Road Safety, PSNI and NIAS.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Support Services) referred to the statistics relating to road traffic collisions and stated that he believed the work of NIFRS and its partners in promoting road safety and raising public awareness was having an impact. He acknowledged the dedication, enthusiasm and professionalism of all staff involved.

Mr Carr congratulated the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Support Services) and his staff on all their work.

During discussion relating to partnership working, etc, Mr Carr noted NIFRS linkage with Community Safety Partnerships and explained that the functions and responsibilities currently undertaken by Community Safety Partnerships and District Policing Partnerships will, from April 2012, be carried out by the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships. He expressed concern that NIFRS will not be represented on these Partnerships and stressed the need to ensure NIFRS representation continued.

The Chief Fire Officer shared Mr Carr's concerns and stated that he was hopeful, given NIFRS involvement currently, this would migrate to the new Partnerships.

### **Operational Performance**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave Members a summary of operational performance for the month of December 2011.

### **HR Performance**

Members noted that 37 Trainee Firefighters will commence training on 30 January 2012 and a Reserve List of candidates will be retained for vacancies which may arise in 2012 and 2013.

Members also noted progress attained with respect to uniformed promotions.

### **Finance Performance**

A comparison of the budget profiles against the actual expenditure incurred at the end of December 2011 was noted, along with the Management Accounts for the period ending 31 December 2011.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed overview of the revenue and capital positions. With respect to the revenue position, he pointed out that the Accounts were indicating a revenue underspend. He informed Members that in December all Directors and Budget Managers had been asked to review their budgetary position and identify any easements or pressures. This resulted in £1.3m approx of net easements being identified. He outlined action which had been taken in an effort to utilise any of this slippage before 31 March to reduce budgetary pressures going forward. He stated, however, that it was unlikely that all easements would be utilised in-year. It was noted that the Director of Finance & Performance Management would be meeting with DHSSPS to discuss the year end position with a view to declaring year end easements.

With respect to capital expenditure, the Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members an explanation of the current position. He noted that NIFRS capital budget was end-loaded and that he had been assured that projects will come in on target.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding various aspects of the information presented.

The Chief Fire Officer noted the Members' questions pertaining to budget profiling and acknowledged that as part of the business planning process, the procedure for developing Business Cases needed to be streamlined and realistic timeframes for projects needed to be set.

### **Wholetime Resource Management Crewing Levels Framework**

Members noted a copy of the Wholetime Resource Management Crewing Levels Framework.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the Service Improvement Team had been tasked to update the old Crewing Levels Document with a new Wholetime Resource Management Crewing Levels Framework in consultation with the Representative Body.

Members noted that the Framework is subject to external consultation. Members also noted that a desktop review, in consultation with the Fire Brigades' Union, had been completed and had not identified any adverse impacts on the protected groups contained within Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that, in order to provide operational assurance, the Framework had operational effect from 1 January 2012. The Framework provides enhanced global fire cover, increased Firefighter safety, increased levels of supervision, a reduction in overtime revenue costs and equality of opportunity for all operational personnel.

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

**Resolved:**                   **“to approve, retrospectively, the Wholetime Resource Management Crewing Levels Framework effective from 1 January 2012”.**

## 7       **Standing Items**

### **NIAO Report – Action Plan**

Members were informed that further to the publication of the NIAO: Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight Report, a NIFRS Action Plan is currently being developed.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Action Plan will detail the recommendations as contained in the NI Audit Office Report and all relevant Directorates and Lead Officers have been allocated to each recommendation. He further explained that each Director will populate the Action Plan with proposed actions necessary to address those issues and recommendations raised by NIAO.

A copy of the Action Plan in its current format was circulated previously to Members for information. The Deputy Chief Fire Officer stated a copy of the finalised Action Plan would be circulated to Members. He assured Members that NIFRS was addressing issues contained within the Report, eg, workforce planning and progress attained.

In response to comments from Mrs Tally, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the implementation of the FSEC methodology would provide NIFRS with the data required to update the risk profiles for Northern Ireland and also a basis for setting priorities targets.

The Chairman referred to the recommendation concerning the need for strong leadership at the top and the importance of this being embedded within NIFRS Corporate Plan. He acknowledged that business planning within the organisation was a corporate responsibility and referred Members to the briefing note pertaining to Warwickshire County Council where a Health & Safety issue had led the Council to accepting liability for the accident. He reminded Members of the imminent retirement of the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs and stressed the need for a senior staff member to continue to take responsibility for Business Planning.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer outlined the background to the Warwickshire case and highlighted that the operational safety needs of Firefighters is the single most important issue currently facing UK Fire & Rescue Services. This is where the greatest potential for staff deaths and consequently where Management could face legal proceedings. He emphasised that NIFRS had a moral and legal obligation to ensure its personnel were safe, explaining that an Operational Test of Competence was now essential. He acknowledged the need to address strategic issues but pointed out there was also a need to address tactical issues. He informed Members of the current position with respect to conducting Operational Tests of Competence within NIFRS and answered Members' questions.

During discussion with regard to training, the Chief Fire Officer informed Members of work which the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and the Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Support Services) was progressing in respect of essential core skills for Firefighters. He reiterated that, in terms of NIFRS budget reductions, he will not compromise on Firefighter safety.

He stressed that NIFRS must deliver its core business whilst being cognisant of the need to seek future efficiencies which will need to be identified. He explained that the Corporate Management Team were currently working on priorities which NIFRS will deliver next year.

The Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Support Services) assured Members that NIFRS was meeting its training objectives.

The Chairman requested that the Board receive regular progress reports with regard to the NIAO Report Action Plan.

### **DID Implementation Plan Update – November 2011**

Members noted the DID Implementation Plan Update as at November 2011.

## **8 Standalone Strategic Items**

### **NIFRS Draft IRMP**

Members noted a draft Summary of the Draft IRMP 2012-15 Consultation Exercise which had been previously circulated at the Special Meeting for the information of Members. Members also noted that a finalised Summary would be produced following conclusion of the consultation exercise on 25 January 2012.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Summary Report would give Members an awareness of the content of the finalised IRMP 2012-15 prior to being presented for approval to the Service Delivery & Performance Committee scheduled to take place in February and subsequent ratification of the IRMP at February's Board Meeting.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer also explained to Members that NIFRS Corporate Plan and Annual Business Plan would then be developed and issued to Members for the March Board Meeting. Members noted that the target 'go-live' date for implementation is 1 April 2012.

### **Draft NIFRS Scheme of Delegation**

The Director of Finance & Performance Management referred Members to the working draft of NIFRS Scheme of Delegation which had been circulated to Members at the December Board Meeting.

Members were requested to forward any final comments prior to the draft Scheme being presented for approval at the February Board Meeting.

### **Revised Service Improvement Project Plan**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that the Revised Project Plan would be presented to the next Meeting of Service Delivery & Performance Committee.

## **9 Relevant Correspondence**

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

- (a) Letter from the Chief Medical Officer, Dr M McBride, regarding the launch of NIAS HART programme and acknowledging the support of NIFRS, in collaboration with PSNI and Maritime and Coastguard Agency, which has contributed to the success of the HART programme; and
- (b) Letter of appreciation from PSNI following the attendance of a Watch Commander and crew of Portstewart Fire Station at an incident on 19 December 2011.

## **10 Sealing of Documents**

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with:

Fiat Professional – Medium Vans, Large Vans and Mechanics Vans;

Rainey & Best Chartered Quantity Surveyors – Conditions of Contract for Enabling Works at Omagh Fire Station, 1 Killybrack Road, Omagh.

## 11 Any Other Business

### **March Board Meeting**

The Chairman reminded Members that it had been agreed, Meetings of the Board will occasionally be held at locations outside Headquarters. He suggested that consideration be given for the March Board Meeting to be held at Southern Area Headquarters.

### **Recruitment & Assessment Schedule**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer updated Members on progress.

### **Operational Assurance Audits**

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed Members that as NIFRS was currently in the process of appointing Area Commanders, it had been agreed that the normal process for Operational Assurance Audits would be put back to September in order to allow the new appointees to embed in their roles.

## 12 Schedule of Future Meetings

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

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THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS  
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED  
AT 4.45 PM

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