

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

24 APRIL 2012

1.30 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
Mr C Mack
Ald Mrs G Rice
Mrs P Tally

APOLOGIES: Mr J Barbour

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Kerr, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Mr D Ashford, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Safety Services)
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance
Management
Mrs A Davidson, Head of HR
Mrs C McNally, Corporate Communications Manager
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr D Jordan, DHSSPS

Prior to the commencement of the Meeting, the Chairman commented positively on the NIFRS Board and Corporate Management Team Strategic Planning Day held on 18 April 2012. He explained that further discussion on the Planning Day would be facilitated later in the Meeting.

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 Minutes – 27 March 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 March 2012, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mrs Rice.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Presentation – Resource Management Review

The Chairman referred to the attendance of Assistant Group Commander G Lowry and Mr B Stansfield at the March Board Meeting. He informed Members he had received a letter of appreciation from the Chief Executive at Coleraine Borough Council following a presentation relating to proposed resource management changes given by Assistant Group Commander Lowry and Mr Stansfield at a recent Committee meeting of the Council.

5 Reports from Board Committees, including adoption of Committee Minutes

Members noted there have been no Meetings of Board Committees since the April Board Meeting.

6 Chairman's Business (including National Joint Council Matters)

Enniskillen

The Chairman informed Members that there were ongoing issues relating to Enniskillen which were giving concern. He acknowledged that the matter was extremely painful and very sensitive issue for the individual concerned but expressed his disappointment as the Board had made a difficult decision which it hoped would bring closure to this highly sensitive issue.

Members noted that the Chairman had met with the Chief Fire Officer and the Area Commander to discuss the matter and that the matter was being monitored.

Disclosure of Unofficial Information to the Media

The Chairman informed Members of the disclosure to the media of the strictly confidential BSO Report pertaining to the alleged fraud investigation. He stated that DHSSPS were aware of the matter and advised Members that DHSSPS Press Office and NIFRS Corporate Communications Manager were managing the issue. He also advised Members that DHSSPS had instigated an immediate investigation into the unofficial disclosure of the information.

The Chairman expressed his displeasure with regard to the matter and its intent to inflict damage to the reputation of individuals and the Organisation.

Mrs Rice concurred with the Chairman's comments and expressed her disappointment regarding the disclosure of the strictly confidential Report and outlined her concerns given that the Report was now part of a DHSSPS investigation.

The Corporate Communications Manager answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the media coverage relating to the Report and how it was being managed.

In response to question from Mr Hanna, the Corporate Communications Manager explained how NIFRS monitored the press, etc, explaining that a Summary of Press Cuttings is circulated regularly to the Corporate Management Team. Mr Hanna suggested that consideration to be given to the circulation of the Summary of Press Cuttings to all Members for information.

Members' Appraisals

The Chairman informed Members that copies of their Performance Assessment Forms for the period 1 April 2011 to 31 March 2012 would be circulated for completion in advance of the May Board Meeting.

Interim Chief Executive

The Chairman informed the Meeting of discussions with DHSSPS regarding the possibility of the secondment of a Chief Executive for period of 12-18 months as NIFRS seeks to re-organise/re-assess its management structure. He stated that the Board had confidence in the work undertaken on the operational side of the Organisation and explained that it now had an opportunity to consider the 'business' aspect.

The Chairman further stated that he would be bringing proposals regarding the secondment of a Chief Executive to the Board.

Mrs Rice, from a corporate governance aspect, sought clarification as to whether the secondment would be advertised, etc. The Chairman stated that advice would have to be sought from DHSSPS.

Honorary Rank – Dame Mary Peters

The Chairman referred to his attendance at the 2011 World Police & Fire Games in New York accompanied by Dame Mary Peters and paid tribute to her commitment and work in respect of the Games and also NI plc. He explained to Members he had discussed a proposal with the Chief Fire Officer regarding asking Dame Mary Peters to act as an ambassador for the Organisation at an honorary rank within NIFRS. He further explained that it would be the intention that Dame Mary would be given a uniform whilst attended events and on formal occasions in order to raise the profile of NIFRS. Members noted that the Director of the NIFRS Band held the honorary rank of Group Commander.

During discussion, Members acknowledged the high esteem in which Dame Mary Peters was held and her profile across all communities in Northern Ireland and, whilst supporting the Chairman's proposal, were conscious of Dame Mary's commitment to and support of 2013 WPFPG, a role which the Board would not wish to impinge upon.

The Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the Corporate Management Team supported the Chairman's proposal and concurred with the Chairman's comments regarding the positive profile which Dame Mary brought to WPFPG. He welcomed the opportunity for NIFRS to have Dame Mary Peters as an ambassador for the Organisation.

During further discussion, the Chairman explained that having Dame Mary Peters as an ambassador to NIFRS would be positive particularly in relation to women and how they relate to the Service, and as a role model for older people. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford also highlighted the potential benefits Dame Mary's profile would bring to community safety advertising campaigns and other community issues.

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

Resolved: **“to confer an honorary rank within NIFRS to Dame Mary Peters to act as an ambassador for NIFRS.”**

NJC Matters

Members noted that the Chairman would be attending Meetings of the National Joint Council in May and June.

Trainee Firefighters' Graduation Ceremony

The Chairman informed the Meeting that the Trainee Firefighters' Graduation Ceremony would be held on 31 May 2012 and encouraged Members to attend the event.

Rathfriland Fire Station

The Chairman noted that the refurbishment of Rathfriland Fire Station was nearing completion and handover to the personnel. He informed Members that the Minister had been invited to officially open the Station and that he hoped there would be an opportunity for Members to have an informal meeting with the Minister afterwards. He stated that Rathfriland Fire Station was a good project for the Minister to visit as it was very much a community based Station.

7 Chief Fire Officer's Business

Members noted the Report on Chief Fire Officer's Business for March 2012. The Chief Fire Officer asked Members to raise any specific questions regarding the Report with Directors after the Meeting.

The Chief Fire Officer took the opportunity to sadly reflect on the unprecedented number of fatal accidental house fires which had occurred within the community. He assured Members that NIFRS have enhanced community safety over recent years. He explained that NIFRS are proactively engaging with everyone in the community to remind of their responsibility to protect themselves and also the vulnerable people within their communities.

Mr Kerr commended Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford on the community safety work to date and sought an update with regard to securing advertising.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford updated Members on the current position with respect to actions taken following the fatal fires to try to raise awareness and so reduce the risk of further occurrences. He explained that he had met with internal senior colleagues to ensure that NIFRS continue to do everything we can to protect the vulnerable people in our society.

Members noted that NIFRS have arranged a meeting to which NIFRS have invited strategic partners from a number of agencies including the Commissioner for Older People, Age NI and RoSPA. It was also noted that NIFRS are hoping to get a representative from Health & Social Care Trusts with a view to utilising care workers as a means of identifying referrals for Home Fire Safety Checks.

With respect to the issue of advertising, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that a submission had been made to the Minister to allow NIFRS to secure advertising during the Government ban. This has now been cleared by the Government Advertising Unit and has gone to the Minister for approval. He explained that NIFRS hope to be able to secure some advertising from the Government framework while it goes through the procurement process for a Media Services Tender.

Mr Kerr expressed his dismay and concern regarding the timeframes in resolving the advertising issue and stressed the need for the matter be addressed and expedited.

In response to Mr Carr's comments regarding the need for NIFRS to be a statutory representative on the Police & Community Safety Partnerships, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford updated Members on progress explaining that NIFRS were seeking designation for a NIFRS representative on the Partnerships.

Mrs Tally acknowledged the excellent work in terms of Prevention Performance but referred to the tragic loss of life stating that one death is one too many. She noted NIFRS Operational Performance as contained within the Chief Fire Officer's Report and pointed out the need to look at Retained turnouts and actual response times as Retained Stations were, in the main, in rural areas, where the fatalities had occurred. She stressed the need to ensure NIFRS is doing everything possible to prevent further loss of life.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained that it was not possible for NIFRS to measure actual response times as it did not have the software to carry out same but it could measure average response times. He assured Members that empiric data was analysed in detail. He advised Members of position with respect to the number of failures to respond in March.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer provided Members with clarification on various aspects relating to NIFRS response to incidents and also with regard to progress on ICT matters.

It was acknowledged that NIFRS needed to undertake Retained recruitment and the Deputy Chief Fire Officer explained the current position highlighting that the matter had been raised at the Accountability Meeting with DHSSPS. He further explained that he would be preparing a Briefing Note for the Minister.

Mrs Tally stated that Retained attendance, etc, was a critical corporate risk to the Organisation and emphasised the need for the Board to be aware of issues and to monitor the matter.

During further discussion relating to ICT issues, associated funding/underspends, the constraints within which NIFRS is required to operate and timeframes for progress, the Chief Fire Officer highlighted the high level of issues which the Corporate Management Team were addressing and stressed that projects, etc, were being prioritised and progressed.

Members recognised the work which had been attained and continued to be progressed by the Corporate Management Team.

Mr Hanna explained that, in terms of activity, a choice needs to be made. He referred to the comments regarding underspends and the process for reallocating funding to other projects and stressed that it was essential at the beginning of the new financial year to have contingencies in place. He noted the significant work which had been achieved over the last couple of years and more recently substantial progress especially with respect to Workforce Planning. He added that there would be challenges ahead and reiterated the need for choices to be made as to the focus for the way forward.

Referring to the Facilitator's comments at the Planning Day and the need to identify the Organisations top 5 risks, the Chairman stated it would be useful for the next Meeting for the Organisation's key risks to be identified and presented to the Board.

Mr Mack concurred with the need to identify the top 5-10 key risks for NIFRS and accepted there were a lot of issues to be resolved. He stated that the focus had been on getting Firefighters in place and commended the Deputy Chief Fire Officer in addressing Workforce Planning matters.

Mrs Tally recognised the progress attained by the Corporate Management Team in dealing with difficult issues and also highlighted the excellent service delivered to the community of Northern Ireland but stated that the Board needed to identify gaps and to challenge how such gaps were filled.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer welcomed Members challenging Officers with respect to matters as it presented the opportunity to advise Members of vulnerabilities. He suggested that consideration be given to the possibility setting aside time for Directors to advise Members of the work undertaken within their individual Directorates.

Contracts Awarded

Members noted a list of Contracts awarded for the month of March 2012.

Financial Performance

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed explanation of the Revenue and Capital position. The Officers answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

HR Performance

At this point
the Head of HR left the Meeting

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer informed Members of progress to date with respect to the appointment of a Director of Human Resources. He explained that he was Technical Adviser to the Appointments Panel and outlined in detail his proposal for taking forward the Assessment Centre for the post.

Following discussion, Members indicated that they were content with the proposed process for the Assessment Centre for the post of Director of Human Resources.

At this point,
the Head of HR rejoined the Meeting

8 Standing Items

NIAO Report – Action Plan

The Chief Fire Officer updated the Meeting on the current position and assured Members that the Corporate Management Team were progressing the Action Plan.

9 Standalone Strategic Items

NIFRS Strategic Plan 2012-2015 & Annual Business Plans

The Chief Fire Officer explained that finalising of the Strategic Plan and Annual Business Plan was work in progress. He stated that as NIFRS had been informed of its Revenue and Capital allocation, the Plans could now be costed.

Members noted that the draft Business Plan would be presented to Board once costed.

Annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return to Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

Members noted the draft Annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return as at 1 January 2012.

The Head of HR outlined the background to the Return and explained that the Monitoring Return is due to be submitted by 1 May 2012 to the Commission who consider its content and may seek further clarification after this date.

10 Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

- (a) Letter of appreciation from Coleraine Borough Council (previously reported in Meeting); and
- (b) Letter from Northern Ireland Audit Office in relation to a proposed procurement exercise on a number of DHSSPS' Arm's Length Bodies and explaining why it had concluded to defer deciding whether to undertake that proposed procurement exercise.

11 Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with:

Telefonica UK Limited – Lease of Communications Cell Site No 4804, Whitla Fire Station.

13 Any Other Business

NIFRS Board and CMT Strategic Planning Day

The Chairman reflected on the Planning Day and gave Members a synopsis of the notes he had taken pertaining to the key areas of discussion, issues identified and suggestions for the way forward.

Members commented positively on the Planning Day and a full and frank discussion ensued with regard to various elements of the Chairman's synopsis.

Following discussion, the Chairman suggested that consideration be given to arranging a 'Follow-Up' Day to the Strategic Planning Day.

The Chief Fire Officer stated that consideration should also be given to the Deputy Chief Fire Officer's suggestion for a morning to be aside in order to give each Director an opportunity to make a presentation to the Board on their respective areas of work.

Operational Activity

The Chairman commended the Corporate Communications Manager and her team, working with the Principal Officers, on their skillful management and reporting of some difficult incidents. He also commended the work of NIFRS personnel in responding and dealing with these incidents.

With respect to NIFRS communication with DHSSPS, the Chairman highlighted the need to remind DHSSPS and the Minister of the excellent service provided by NIFRS on a day and daily basis.

14 Schedule of Future Meetings

The Schedule of Future Meetings was noted.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.10 PM
