

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

24 JUNE 2008

2.00 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Mr J McKeever

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)
Ms A Conley, Director of Human Resources
Dr D Michail, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance Management
Mrs C McNally, Corporate Communications Manager
Mrs A Davidson, Equality Manager
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary

1 Apologies

Apologies were noted.

2 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 May 2008, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Pollock, seconded by Mr Campbell.

Arising from the Minutes:

Equality & Diversity Forum

The Chair referred to the Equality & Diversity Forum and sought an update on progress.

The Director of Human Resources informed Members that the first meeting of the Forum was scheduled to take place on 31 July 2008.

Remuneration Committee Meeting – 26 February 2008

The Chair informed the Meeting that Deloitte had been appointed as the Consultants to undertake a review of Principal Officers' remuneration.

Service Support Committee Meeting – 19 May 2008

Equality Matters

Draft Report on Progress on the Implementation of the Voluntary Undertaking for the period 1 February 2007 to 31 January 2008

Draft Annual Progress Report on Section 75 Implementation for the period 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008

Members noted the draft Voluntary Undertaking Report which was a requisite activity under the existing Voluntary Undertaking arrangement between NIFRS and the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The Director of Human Resources explained that the Report outlined religious composition for all staff groups and gave details of applicant flow, concentrating on areas of under-representation. She stated that the Voluntary Undertaking had now been in place 10 years and much progress had been made in outreach measures. She explained that NIFRS was now ready to review the agreement with the Equality Commission in line with the legislative requirements and the current equality and diversity agenda.

Members noted the draft Section 75 Annual Progress Report which was part of the statutory obligations upon NIFRS in relation to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Director of Human Resources informed Members that the Report outlined mainstreaming activities carried out throughout the reporting period.

The Director of Human Resources recommended approval of the Reports for submission to the Equality Commission in August.

The Chair suggested a few minor amendments relating to the draft Annual Progress Report on Section 75 Implementation.

During discussion with respect to the Report on progress on the Implementation of the Voluntary Undertaking, Members noted the progress which had been attained with respect to the overall workforce composition but expressed concern regarding the position in relation to the 12 Retained Stations highlighted by the Equality Commission and also the Control staff where the representation of one community has fallen during the past year from 14% to 9%. As regards Retained Firefighters, Members acknowledged the difficulties in obtaining a workforce fully representative of the Northern Ireland community, especially in rural areas, given the operational requirement that Retained personnel live and work within 5 minutes of the particular Station to respond to calls. However, 2 of the 4 identified Stations, all having a workforce 100% comprised on one community or the other, are located in towns and Mr Bradley asked why progress has not been made here.

The Director of Human Resources outlined outreach initiatives and other measures which are employed during Retained recruitment campaigns. She also referred to the recent recruitment exercise for Regional Control Centre staff and highlighted the level of outreach which had been undertaken by NIFRS to attract applicants.

Mr Bradley referred to the issue of gender and expressed concern regarding the percentage of female representation within Firefighter personnel – presently 1.6%. He quoted some statistics of the considerably higher levels of female representation in other disciplined, uniformed services within the UK, services in which females have attained managerial and more senior positions. He also referred to the targets likely to be set UK wide for Fire Services in general and, whilst acknowledging the work carried out by the Equality Unit, asked why NIFRS has not been more successful to date and was it a strategy problem?

The Director of Human Resources stated that NIFRS was aware of the problem and pointed out that it was going to be the focus of the Equality Unit who would be seeking advice and assistance on the issue from the Equality Commission. A discussion took place with regard to outreach measures and Members agreed that suggestions be sought from other Organisations with regard to the matter. The Equality Manager advised that the Meeting of Forums in which she participated afforded opportunities for networking with other Organisations.

Following the discussion, the Chair asked the Director of Human Resources to bring the concerns raised by the Board to the Equality & Diversity Forum for consideration and report back to the Service Support Committee, and ultimately to the Board.

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

Resolved: **“to approve the draft Report on Progress on the Implementation of the Voluntary Undertaking for the period 1 February 2007 – 31 January 2008 and the Draft Annual progress Report on Section 75 Implementation for the period 1 April 2007 - 31 March 2008 for submission to the Equality Commission”.**

At this point,
the Equality Manager left the Meeting

3 **Audit Committee Meeting – 20 June 2008**

The draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on 20 June 2008 were circulated at the Meeting for the information of Members.

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Mr Campbell, informed Members that Mr D Lynn, Deputy Chief Local Government Auditor, NIAO, and the external Auditors were in attendance at the Meeting. He gave an overview of the business discussed at the Meeting which had included reports on the Audit of Human Resource Services and Community Safety. He stated that these were positive reports which would also be presented to the relevant Standing Committees for information.

Members noted that the Statutory Annual Accounts had also been discussed and Mr Campbell highlighted that the external Auditors would be reporting an unqualified opinion on the Accounts.

Statutory Annual Accounts

Members noted the draft Annual Accounts which had been reviewed by the Audit Committee on 20 June 2008. The Committee had also received a report from KPMG, the external Auditors appointed by the Northern Ireland Audit Office.

- - - - -

At this point,
Mr Clarke left the Meeting

- - - - -

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed overview of the Annual Accounts highlighting the key points. The Officers answered Members' questions in relation to the information presented.

Mr Hatch drew Members' attention to the comments made in respect of the Quality Services Unit. The Chief Fire Officer stated that he and the Audit Committee had been aware of the internal backlog and pointed out that external Consultants had been engaged to address the backlog. He outlined the current position with respect to resources within the Unit and emphasised that NIFRS would be recruiting for a Quality & Audit Manager initially but that in the interim a member of Agency staff was in place and working well.

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 2008”.**

4 Service Delivery Committee Meeting – 24 June 2008

Mr Harper, Chair of the Service Delivery Committee, informed Members of the business discussed at the Meeting. He advised that with respect to the IRMP Action Plan 2007/08 work was continuing on the review of the locations of Fire Stations and resources in the Belfast area and review of the second pumping appliances at 12 Station locations across Northern Ireland and stated that they were on schedule for completion in September. He highlighted that the Committee had received an update on the new Fire Safety Legislation and had received a presentation from Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig regarding the passive and active fire protection systems installed and the management solutions provided at the Victoria Centre in Belfast.

In response to a suggestion from Mr Hatch, it was agreed that Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig's presentation would be given at a future Board Meeting.

At this point,
Mr Harper left the Meeting

5 National Joint Council Matters

Report on Meetings

The Chair reported on the National Joint Council Meeting held in Belfast on 10 June 2008 and highlighted that an increase of 2.45% on rates of pay had been agreed with effect from 1 July 2008 and also an increase of 2.45% on CPD. He stated that he felt this was a significant and satisfactory outcome.

Members noted that agreement had also been reached with respect to minor amendments to the Grey Book and an amendment to the Fairness & Dignity at Work Scheme.

6 Chair's Business

The Chair gave the Meeting a brief account of his activities since the last Meeting of the Board.

With respect to the issue of Members' Allowances, it was noted that this matter was ongoing.

7 Chief Fire Officer's Report

The Chief Fire Officer circulated a Monthly News Brief, along with an update on the Capital Investment for NIFRS and preparation of the Business Case (OBC1), for the information of Members. Members noted the broad contents of OBC1.

Operational Activities

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of operational activities and incidents of note during the month of May. The Officers answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the information presented.

Management Accounts

The Director of Finance & Performance Management outlined to Members the financial position for the period ending 31 May 2008 and answered Members' questions.

8 Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

Letter from the Permanent Secretary advising that Mr W F Gillespie had been re-appointed as Chair of the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service Board for a further 4-year period (until 30 June 2012).

9 Sealing of Documents

Members approved the undernoted documents for Sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Hunter Apparel – supply and delivery of Uniform; and

Belfast Metropolitan College – provision of MS Office Training and Certification.

10 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.

Members noted a list of likely dates for Board Meetings in September, October and November. Members further noted that Committee Meetings would be arranged by Committee Chairs.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.05 PM
