

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

25 JANUARY 2011

2.00 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Cllr A Hatch

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T Wright, Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Mr E Doyle, Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer
(Community Development)
Mr C Kerr, Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer
(Technical Development)
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance
Management
Dr D Michail, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Mrs H Ellis, Senior Human Resources Manager
Mrs C McNally, Corporate Communications Manager
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr D Jordan, DHSSPS

1 Apologies

Apologies were noted.

Prior to the commencement of Business, 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.

2 Chair's Introductory Remarks and Outline of Key Priorities for Board

The Chair, Dr Joe McKee, introduced himself to the Meeting and outlined what he felt were the key priorities for the NIFRS Board.

He pointed out the level of scrutiny under which NIFRS operated and stressed the need for Board Members to be scrupulous at all times in their conduct and to adhere to the public service values as outlined in NIFRS Code of Best Practice. He referred to the Code of Conduct and the need for protocols to be adhered to, especially when dealing with operational aspects of the Service. He reminded Members that any operational issues should be raised through the Chief Fire Officer or the Senior Principal Officer.

The Chair suggested that it would be beneficial for Members and the Principal Officers to share contact details. Members supported this proposal.

He stated that NIFRS was a complex organisation which needed stability and clear direction. With the appointment of a new Board, a new Chief Fire Officer and the forthcoming appointments of Principal Officers, Members now had an excellent opportunity to take the Organisation forward.

Appointment of Chief Fire Officer

The Chair informed the Meeting that the Appointments Panel progressing the recruitment of a Chief Fire Officer had met on 20 January 2011. He invited Mr Hanna, Chair of the Appointments Panel, to convey the Panel's proposal to the Board.

Mr Hanna informed Members that the Appointments Panel, assisted by the Government's Chief Fire & Rescue Adviser, Sir Ken Knight, had conducted the interviews for the post of Chief Fire Officer. He stated that the Panel unanimously recommended that Mr Peter Craig be appointed the new Chief Fire Officer of NIFRS. He advised Members that Dr Andrew McCormick, Permanent Secretary, DHSSPS, who had acted as an observer on the Panel, was satisfied with the Panel's recommendation, subject to ratification by the full Board.

The Chair advised Members that Mr Craig's appointment would be subject to a satisfactory medical report.

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

Resolved: **“to approve the appointment of Mr Peter Craig as the Chief Fire Officer and Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service”.**

The Chair, on behalf of the Board, congratulated Mr Craig on his appointment to Chief Fire Officer.

The Chair informed Members that the Senior HR Manager was working to fill the sub-ordinate posts which would bring a period of stability to the Organisation.

3 Minutes – 23 November 2010

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 November 2010, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Hanna, seconded by Mrs Rice.

Arising out of the Minutes:

ICT Strategy

Members were reminded that at its Meeting on 16 November 2010, the Service Support Committee considered the draft ICT Strategy 2010-2015.

Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer Kerr informed the Meeting that a presentation had been made to the Committee regarding the draft ICT Strategy and explained that, while the Committee had endorsed the draft Strategy, due to pressures of business the Strategy had not been formally approved. Formal approval of the draft ICT Strategy 2010-2015 will enable Officers to progress the objectives contained within the Strategy.

Mrs Rice, Vice-Chair of the Service Support Committee, commended the Strategy for approval.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Mrs Grant, unanimously –

Resolved: **“to approve the draft ICT Strategy 2010-2015”.**

Prioritisation of Capital Review

Further to a request at the Board Meeting held on 23 November 2010, Members noted a copy of NIFRS Capital Priorities for the next CSR period which had been circulated for information.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members an overview of the information presented. He also emphasised that, although broken down into prioritisation categories, NIFRS would be taking forward as many of the projects as possible.

The Acting Chief Fire Officer reiterated that all the projects were a priority for NIFRS but explained that NIFRS had to consider these projects in terms of capital made available by DHSSPS in the CSR period 2011-2015. He stated that any changes to the Prioritisation of Capital Review would be reported to the Board and their impact considered collectively.

The Officers answered Members' questions on various aspects of the information presented. Officers also updated Members on progress with regard to Business Cases for key projects.

Mr J Barbour referred to Desertcreat project and stressed the need for the project to be progressed. The Chair explained that he and the Acting Chief Fire Officer had met with DHSSPS officials regarding the joint college at Desertcreat. He stated that NIFRS's commitment to the project had been re-affirmed.

The Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of the business discussed at a recent Desertcreat Project Management Board meeting. He expressed his disappointment in relation to the issue of affordability being raised by DHSSPS especially as NIFRS had not been aware of this beforehand. He highlighted that the Board had endorsed the Senior Management Team's recommendation that the Desertcreat project is affordable.

4 Draft Audit Committee Meeting – 13 December 2010

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Audit Committee Meeting held on 13 December 2010.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Draft Letter – Accounting for Firefighters' Pensions

At the Audit Committee Meeting held on 4 June 2010, NIFRS's external Auditors raised concerns in respect of the format of NIFRS Financial Statements. This was subsequently brought to the attention of DHSSPS Public Safety Unit who stated this would require legislative changes and there were no immediate plans to change the legislation.

In light of the aims of HM Treasury's 'Clear Line of Sight' Project Report, the Audit Committee considered that it may be opportune to again raise NIFRS's concerns in respect of the format of NIFRS Financial Statements and recommended that the Chair of the Audit Committee forward a letter to DHSSPS on this issue. Members noted a copy of the draft letter.

Mrs Rice, Chair of the Audit Committee, acknowledged the need to have obtained Board approval to forward the letter. She recommended approval of the letter and also recommended that the letter be signed off by the Chair of the Board.

The Chair emphasised the need for any recommendations by NIFRS Standing Committees to be approved by the Board.

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

Resolved: **“to approve the draft letter for submission to DHSSPS subject to some minor amendments”.**

Change of Name for Audit Committee to Audit & Risk Management Committee

Mrs Rice informed Members that, at its Meeting on 13 December 2010, the Audit Committee had referred to the governance related recommendations contained within the DID Report and in particular the Report's recommendation that the Audit Committee be renamed the Audit & Risk Management Committee.

Members noted that the Audit Committee recommended approval for the Audit Committee to be renamed the Audit & Risk Management Committee.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Mr J Barbour, unanimously –

Resolved: **“that the Audit Committee be renamed the Audit & Risk Management Committee.”**

Mrs Rice explained to the Meeting that the Audit Committee had also considered the DID recommendation relating to the Board’s Committee structure and that the Committee had proposed a Workshop to specifically consider the matter. She suggested that Mr Hanna also attend the Workshop and sought Board approval to proceed.

It was agreed that the Audit & Risk Management Committee convene a Workshop to consider NIFRS Committee structure.

5 Minutes of Special Meeting – 15 December 2010

The Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 15 December 2010, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mrs Tally, seconded by Mr Hanna.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Assessment & Development Centres

The Acting Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the independent third party review of the Assessment & Development Centre process was underway and it was anticipated that by the end of the week NIFRS would have assurances that the information under consideration had been verified.

He explained that the outcomes and implications of the report would be considered and reported to the Board prior to considering the way forward. He added that he was working closely with the Senior HR Manager to ensure compliance and reiterated the need for NIFRS to have the facts verified to enable the matter to be progressed.

6 Draft Special Remuneration Committee Meeting – 15 December 2010

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Special Remuneration Committee Meeting held on 15 December 2010.

7 Draft Special Remuneration Committee Meeting – 6 January 2011

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Special Remuneration Committee Meeting held on 6 January 2011.

8 Remuneration Committee Meeting – 25 January 2011

Members noted that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee had been held on 25 January 2011.

The Chair explained that the Committee had considered a briefing paper relating to a proposal for Standby and Callout Allowances. He stated that the Committee had considered the proposal and were content with the proposal.

The Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer assured Members that any final proposal would be presented to the Board prior to seeking DHSSPS approval.

9 National Joint Council Matters

Members noted that the Chair would be representing NIFRS at meetings of the National Joint Council (NJC).

The Chair informed Members of the allowance he would receive as NIFRS National Joint Council representative and would attend 3/4 meetings per year. He explained that any travel and subsistence expenses for these meetings would be met by NIFRS with the NJC meeting the expenses of any additional meetings.

The Acting Chief Fire Officer informed Members, for the record, that during the interim Board arrangement period he had not received any remuneration for representing NIFRS at NJC meetings.

10 Chairman's Business

The Chair informed Members that he had attended a meeting with the Health Minister and also the Permanent Secretary, DHSSPS, and had met colleagues within the Public Safety Unit.

Best Day/Time for Board/Committee Meetings Annual Schedule of Meetings Board at Meetings at Area Command Headquarters

The Chair sought Members' comments in relation to the best day/time for Board and Committee Meetings.

He explained that he would be suggesting that the February Board Meeting be held at FRS Training Centre to afford Members the opportunity to see the facilities at Boucher. He added that he would also be inviting colleagues from the Public Safety Unit to attend.

Mr J Barbour stressed the need for Members to be given as much advance notice as possible of dates for Meetings.

Following discussion, it was agreed that NIFRS Board Meetings would be held on the third Tuesday of each month at 2.00 pm.

Referring to the Annual Schedule of Meetings, the Chair stated that he would be proposing that 2 Board Meetings within the incoming year would be held at alternative venues, eg, at Boucher with a second Meeting being held at Crescent Link Fire Station, Londonderry. He stated that Board Meetings would subsequently be rotated round the Area Commands.

It was agreed that Board Meetings be convened on the third Tuesday of each month with effect from 15 March 2011. It was further agreed that this Meeting be held at FRS Training Centre.

Notice of Direction from DHSSPS relating to Industrial Tribunal

The Chair informed Members of the Department's intention, under Article 56 of The Fire & Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006, to issue a Direction to the NIFRS relating to its handling of the claim to an Industrial Tribunal raised by Dr D Michail, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs. Under the Direction, the Department proposes to require NIFRS to engage with the Department at each stage of the handling of the Industrial Tribunal claim and to take no action until the Department has given its approval.

He explained that under Article 56, the Department was obliged to consult with NIFRS before issuing a Direction and were, therefore, inviting NIFRS to consider the Department's proposed action in relation to the Industrial Tribunal claim.

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

Following discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mr D Barbour, seconded by Mrs Tally, unanimously –

Resolved: **“to accept the Direction from the Department and assent to engaging with the Department at each stage of the handling of the Industrial Tribunal”.**

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

Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution Centre

Members noted a letter pertaining to the ongoing involvement of NIFRS in consultation relating to the vision of a Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution Centre.

Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer Kerr informed Members that he had been involved in conflict transformation activities for many years, particularly around interface areas in Belfast. He explained that NIFRS endorsed the vision of a Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution Centre as a means to strengthen work in the field of peace-building and good relations in Northern Ireland.

The Chair stated that he had a personal commitment to peace and reconciliation and indicated his support for NIFRS's continued involvement.

The Board endorsed the letter relating to NIFRS's ongoing involvement in consultation relating to the vision of a Peace-Building and Conflict Resolution Centre.

11 DID Report - Update

Report from Mr A Hanna

The Chair acknowledged the support and assistance given to him by Mr Hanna, especially whilst filling the role of Vice-Chair. He expressed his gratitude for all Mr Hanna's work.

The Members noted a report prepared by Mr Hanna relating to the recommendations emanating from the DID review of NIFRS. Mr Hanna gave Members an overview of his report highlighting that there were 23 recommendations directly relating to the Board and reminded Members of the Minister's views.

He explained that there were 9 recommendations which could be progressed now and suggested that the Board establish a small Working Group to ensure progress on the recommendations. The proposed Working Group would consist of the Chair, Mr A Hanna, the Acting Chief Fire Officer and the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs. Members noted that the Working Group would be chaired by Mr Hanna who will also continue to represent the Board on the DID Programme Management Board. Mr Hanna stated that it may be necessary to involve other Board Members and staff in specific discussions.

The Working Group will focus on the implementation of these recommendations and the actions needed to bring them into effect within a reasonable time-frame.

It was noted that the next meeting of the DID Programme Management Board was scheduled to take place on 17 February 2011.

The Acting Chief Fire Officer advised Members of work which was ongoing at Senior Management level and explained the importance of feeding that work into the Working Group.

The Chair reiterated his appreciation to Mr Hanna for all his work.

**Review of Agenda Items for Board Meetings
Rationalisation of existing Standing Committees
Review of Standing Orders**

It was noted that the above items would be work streams flowing from the Board DID Working Group.

12 Proposal to enter into a Licence Agreement with Isaac Agnew Holdings

Members noted a Memorandum from the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs outlining the proposal to enter into a Licence Agreement with Isaac Agnew Holdings for the rental of a portion of NIFRS Boucher Training site.

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs gave Members a brief outline of the proposal and the Officers answered Members' questions.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Mr Mack, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the proposal to enter into a Licence Agreement with Isaac Agnew Holdings for the sum of £62,500 per annum for 9 months, less one day, providing the relevant legal assurances are satisfied, renewable by agreement of both parties for a further period(s)”.

13 Proposal to enter into a Lease Agreement with Belfast International Airport for the provision of “Real Fire” Training Site Area

Members noted a Memorandum from the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs giving details of the proposal to enter into a Lease Agreement with Belfast International Airport.

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs explained that the purpose of the proposal is to reduce the corporate risk associated with NIFRS failure to deliver suitable “real fire” Firefighter training. The Officers answered Members' questions on various aspects of the proposal.

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

Resolved: “to approve the proposal to enter into a Lease Agreement with Belfast International Airport for the sum of £13,000 per annum for a 0.9 acre site for the purpose of training NIFRS personnel in a “real fire” environment.

14 Chief Fire Officer's Report

Enniskillen Fire Station

The Acting Chief Fire Officer gave Members an update on the concerted efforts made to resolve the very sensitive issue of the Enniskillen Memorial Montage. He explained that he had been mandated by the interim NIFRS Board to consult with local Firefighters in Enniskillen, recognising that consensus and a locally acceptable solution was the best way forward.

He stated that the local Firefighters had engaged fully in this consultation process, but unfortunately they had not been able to reach a consensus on any of the proposals.

During discussion, Members expressed their disappointment that a local agreement had not been reached to bring closure to this issue and to what has been a painful and distressing time for the local community in Enniskillen.

Members stated that the local resolution of this issue remained an absolute priority for the NIFRS Board, the Acting Chief Fire Officer and the Firefighters in Enniskillen. The Board agreed to consider the Acting Chief Fire Officer's update and to explore other opportunities to resolve this issue at a local level.

Operational Activities

Members noted the Operational Activities Report and Incidents of Note for the months of November and December 2010. The Acting Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Officers answered Members' questions regarding various aspects of the information presented.

Contracts Awarded for the Month of December 2010

Members noted a list of Contracts awarded for the month of December 2010.

Mrs Rice expressed the desirability, in terms of good corporate governance, for more detail to be provided with respect to the list of Contracts awarded. The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs undertook to discuss further with Mrs Rice.

Management Accounts

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed outline of the Management Accounts for the period ending 31 December 2010. Members noted that the financial position at the end of December 2010 was showing a net underspend in a number of cost centres, most notably, staff costs, training, injury/ill-health payments, operating expenditure and establishment costs.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management emphasised that Finance staff were working closely with budget-holders to ensure continued monitoring of expenditure but added that it may be necessary to declare an easement in February monitoring to DHSSPS.

The Officers answered Members' questions on the information presented.

15 Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

- (a) Letter from PSNI recognising the work of NIFRS at an incident on 12 December 2010 at Lurgan Park, Lurgan;
- (b) Memorandum from Area Commander (Training & Development) acknowledging the success of NIFRS personnel in gaining Training & Development Awards as follows:

Assistant Group Commander L Entwistle – ILM Learner of the Year 2010 (Regional Winner);
Station Commander (Controls) M McClean – City & Guilds Medal of Excellence 2010; and
Mrs G McCartan – Harland Award 2010.

It was agreed that the Chairman, on behalf of the Board, would forward letters of congratulations to the successful personnel.

- (c) Letter from Lancashire Fire & Rescue Service offering NIFRS opportunity to comment on its Draft Risk Management Plan 2011-13;
- (d) RFU Newsletter 'The Tip Sheet'.

16 Sealing of Documents

Members approved the undernoted documents for Sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Independent Occupational Health Limited – for the provision of an Occupational Health Scheme for a period of 12 months from 1.1.11 to 31.12.11; and

Piperhill Construction Limited – Replacement Roof Covering at Portadown Fire Station.

17 Meetings of the Board and its Committees

Members noted the dates of Meetings, etc, of the Board and its Committees during the month of February.

The Chair asked the Chairs of the Board's Standing Committees to consider setting Meeting dates for the remainder of the year.

Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer Doyle referred to the invitations extended to LIFE Scheme Graduation Ceremonies and encouraged Members' attendance. Members noted dates as follows:

28 January 2011 – Northland Fire Station;
4 February 2011 – Ballymena Fire Station;
11 February 2011 – Portrush Fire Station;
18 February 2011 – Glengormley Fire Station.

Acting Assistant Chief Fire Officer Doyle also advised Members of Electrical Fire Safety Week and advised that Home Fire Safety Checks were also available to Members.

The Chair referred to the 'On Board' Training Course being held on 4 February 2011 and advised Members that arrangements were being made for a Board photograph on that date.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.40 PM
