

**NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING**

**25 OCTOBER 2011**

**1.30 PM**

**WESTERN AREA HEADQUARTERS, LONDONDERRY**

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

APOLOGIES: Mrs P Tally

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr C Kerr, Deputy Chief Fire Officer  
Dr D Michail, Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs  
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary  
Mrs H Robinson, DHSSPS

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Chairman expressed his appreciation to Western Area Command for hosting the Board Meeting and for giving Board Members a tour of Station facilities.

**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 September 2011**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 September 2011, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Mrs Grant.

Arising out of the Minutes:

### **Schedule of Future Meetings Finance Committee**

Mr Kerr, Chairman of the Finance Committee, referred to the postponed Meeting of 4 October and pointed out the need to agree a date for a Meeting of the Committee.

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

The Chief Fire Officer advised Members that, as reported at the last Meeting, he had now met with the Fire Brigades' Union Representative for the individuals concerned regarding their letters of claim and explained that the letters were imminent.

The Chief Fire Officer further explained that discussions had also been held with the third party representative and the Fire Brigades' Union regarding convening a formal meeting and that the Director of Finance & Performance Management was currently collating potential costs. It was noted a Meeting was scheduled to take place in early November.

The Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions.

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

### **Audit & Risk Management Committee Minutes – 21 October 2011**

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee held on 21 October 2011 were circulated at the Meeting.

Mrs Rice, Chairman of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, explained that the Special Meeting had been convened to consider the draft NIFRS Corporate Governance Framework and the Committee recommended approval of the Framework.

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs gave Members a brief background to the development of the Framework and explained that it should be read in conjunction with NIFRS Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegation and the Management Statement & Financial Memorandum. He answered Members' questions on aspects of the document. Members noted that the Framework would be reviewed annually.

The Chairman informed Members of Fraud Awareness Training for NIFRS staff which he had attended in order to highlight the Board's commitment to high standards in corporate governance. He encouraged Members to maintain an awareness of their roles and responsibilities. He thanked the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs and his staff for their work.

The Chief Fire Officer referred Members to the list of Appendices at the back of the document and explained that these would be provided electronically.

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee held on 21 October 2011 were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mr J Barbour, seconded by Mr D Barbour.

### **Human Resources Committee Minutes – 21 October 2011**

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held on 21 October 2011 were circulated at the Meeting.

Mr Hanna, Chairman of the Human Resources Committee, informed Members that the Special Meeting had been convened to consider the Job Descriptions for the vacant posts of Director of Human Resources and Director of Safety Services. He gave Members a brief overview of the discussion at the Meeting and explained that the Committee had agreed that the vacant senior post in Human Resources should remain as the Director of Human Resources and recommended approval of the Job Description subject to amendments.

With respect to the Job Description for the post of Director of Safety Services, he explained that the Committee recommended approval of the Job Description subject to one minor point of clarification.

Members noted copies of the Job Descriptions.

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held on 21 October 2011 were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mr D Barbour, seconded by Mrs Rice.

## **5 Chairman's Business (including National Joint Council Matters)**

### **Fraud Awareness Training**

As reported earlier, Members noted that the Chairman had attended a Fraud Awareness Training session on 19 October 2011.

### **Health & Safety Workshop**

The Chairman informed Members that a Health & Safety Workshop for Members will be held on the morning of 22 November 2011 prior to the Board Meeting.

### **Event in December**

The Chairman proposed that the Board host an event in December at which Members would have the opportunity to meet with the Corporate Management Team and Senior Managers and suggested 20 December.

The Chief Fire Officer suggested a similar format to last year when representatives from Headquarters, the Areas, etc, were invited to meet with Board Members.

**This was agreed.**

## **Enniskillen Memorial Montage**

The Chairman informed the Meeting that he and the Chief Fire Officer had attended Enniskillen Fire Station to communicate the Board's decision to replace the current tribute to the 1987 Enniskillen Remembrance Day bomb atrocity with a revised memorial montage. He stated that it had been a well-measured meeting and that the resolution appeared to be acceptable to the Crew.

The Chairman informed Members that, subsequently, Mr Gault had reverted to his initial position, that he wished to see the original memorial montage reinstated and had indicated that he had not agreed to the revised montage. The Chairman reminded Members that changes had been made to the revised montage in light of specific requests by Mr Gault and his partner. The Chairman expressed his disappointment and stated that the amendments had been made as requested and that, in good faith, the revised montage had been mounted in the entrance hall.

The Chairman informed Members that Mr Gault was planning a peaceful protest on the following Thursday evening which he would be leading to Enniskillen Fire Station.

During discussion, Members acknowledged the work of the Chairman, the Chief Fire Officer and the Fire Brigades' Union in progressing this very sensitive issue. Members acknowledged that this has been an extremely painful and distressing time for all concerned and restated that the Board had made a difficult decision which it hoped would bring closure to this highly sensitive issue. Members accepted that a point could be reached when the Board would need to publicly present its account of this issue.

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At this point,  
Mr Hatch entered the Meeting

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The Chief Fire Officer commended the personnel at Enniskillen Fire Station for their professionalism during this matter and in accepting the Board's decision. With respect to the protest, the Chief Fire Officer outlined contingencies to manage the situation.

## **Leading Firefighter J McCloskey (Deceased)**

Referring to a letter received from the Minister following a meeting with the family of the late J McCloskey, the Chairman explained to Members that he and the Chief Fire Officer had considered the Minister's letter and had responded indicating that they could see no value in re-opening the investigation especially given the various official Agencies involved in the original investigation.

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

Members noted the Chief Fire Officer's Report for the month of 2011.

## **Operational Performance**

The Chief Fire Officer gave Members an outline of the information relating to NIFRS operational performance during September 2011.

The Chief Fire Officer referred Members to the Memorandum from the Deputy Chief Fire Officer in relation to an update on the operations and change management process. It was noted that, following recent Committee Meetings, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer had undertaken to provide a monthly update on significant change management issues impacting on operational service delivery.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of the information pertaining to the following:

### Service Delivery & Performance Committee –

- FSEC Project Implementation Plan;
- Draft IRMP Consultation Exercise;
- Station Management Assurance Programme;
- Operational Performance – Summary – September 2011.

### Human Resources Committee –

- Wholetime Vacancies – establishment of a Project Team to address Uniformed promotions;
- Project Plan for Wholetime and Retained promotions;
- Briefing Note on Wholetime Recruitment exercise.

### Audit & Risk Management Committee –

- NIFRS Business Continuity Planning;
- Operational Assessment of Service Delivery Audits – Revised process;
- Progress on outstanding Rank to Role Review matters.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding the information previously circulated, particularly with respect to the draft IRMP Consultation Exercise.

The Chairman commended the Chief Fire Officer, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and their Teams on the progress attained.

The Chief Fire Officer acknowledged the Chairman's comments and stated that through the professionalism of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, the Corporate Management Team and staff across the Organisation, NIFRS was starting to deliver a more efficient and effective Fire & Rescue Service.

## **HR Performance**

Referring to the Wholetime Recruitment campaign, Members noted the update on progress and the Chief Fire Officer commended Assistant Chief Fire Officer Doyle and his Team for all their work in ensuring that the exercise remained on target. He informed Members that there were some anomalies which were being addressed.

Members also noted progress with respect to Support Staff vacancies.

### **Financial Performance**

The Chief Fire Officer summarised the financial performance noting that, due to the £3m budget cut imposed by DHSSPS, NIFRS had moved from the position of a significant underspend to an overspend.

Members noted the Management Accounts for the period ended 30 September 2011 and the Chief Fire Officer gave a detailed overview of the information presented. He emphasised that the Corporate Management Team would be closely monitoring the budget position to ensure a break-even position is achieved at the year end.

With respect to the capital budget, Members were informed that DHSSPS had approved the reallocation of easements from existing projects to the procurement of fire appliances and other minor capital projects. He reiterated that the Corporate Management Team would be closely monitoring the budget to ensure the best use of all available resources.

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs gave the Meeting a synopsis of progress in relation to the Omagh and Rathfriland capital projects, highlighting that the construction team had arrived on site at Rathfriland the previous day. He answered Members' questions in relation to project management.

Referring to the budget reduction, the Chief Fire Officer advised Members that the Corporate Management Team were currently preparing a response to DHSSPS in relation to the CSR budgets as a result of the reduction. Members noted that the Board would be kept informed as matters progressed.

Mr Hanna stressed the importance of Finance representation at Board Meetings and the need for the Board to be very aware of the finances for the next few years.

### **Contracts Awarded – September 2011**

Members noted a list of Contracts awarded for the month of September 2011.

Mrs Rice commented that, in light of concerns from some Members regarding Contracts awarded, she had raised the issue of the approvals for contracts with the Chairman. She outlined the concerns raised and explained that she was asking that contracts be brought to the full Board for approval.

The Chief Fire Officer, whilst welcoming openness and transparency, explained that to bring every contract to the Board for approval would significantly delay the function of the Corporate Management Team in progressing issues.

Mrs Rice suggested that the existing practice was little more than a 'rubber-stamping' exercise and requested that Members might choose a number of Contracts to be presented to the Audit & Risk Management Committee for verification.

The Director of Planning & Planning Affairs explained in detail the procurement process and the levels of approval required. Members were also advised that the Internal Audit Unit conducted an audit of those processes. He informed Members that a revised Scheme of Delegation was due to be presented to the Board and suggested the possibility of including a reference to the approval of contracts and defining the delegated limits.

Mrs Rice assured Officers that, whilst the Board was accountable for funding and had responsibilities in terms of governance, Members did not wish to scrutinise every Contract. She welcomed the suggestion of the inclusion of a reference to contracts within the Scheme of Delegation. Members concurred with Mrs Rice's comments.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding the list of Contracts.

## **7 Standing Items**

### **Update – DID Recommendations**

Members noted the DID Recommendations Implementation Plan at August 2011.

Mr Hanna, Chairman of the DID Working Group, informed Members that the Working Group had met the previous week to consider progress and update the DID Recommendations Implementation Plan prior to the DID Project Board Meeting scheduled to take place on 8 November 2011.

Mr Hanna gave the Meeting a synopsis of the current position.

## **8 Relevant Correspondence**

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

- (a) Letter of appreciation from a retired member of staff following attendance and receipt of an award at the Long Service Awards Ceremony;
- (b) Letter from DHSSPS advising that The Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) Order (NI) 2011 will be laid before the Assembly on 24 October 2011 and should come into effect on 1 January 2012.

## **9 Sealing of Documents**

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with:

Omagh Enterprise Company Limited – Lease for Decant Facilities for Omagh District Headquarters;

Volkswagon Group UK Limited c/o Skoda – Car for Chief Fire Officer; and

Volkswagon Group UK Limited c/o Skoda – 22 Rapid Response Vehicles.

## 10 Any Other Business

### **Cushendall Fire Station**

The Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the current position.

### **Flooding Incident – Beragh**

Mr Hatch expressed his appreciation to Fire & Rescue Service personnel following the major flooding incident at Beragh.

The Chairman and Members acknowledged the excellent work of NIFRS personnel during recent events.

## 11 Schedule of Future Meetings

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

### **Finance Committee Meeting**

**It was agreed that a Meeting be convened on 9 November 2011 at 11.00 am.**

Post-Meeting Note: This Meeting was rescheduled to 17 November 2011.

### **Training - Risk Management and Best Practice in Audit Committees**

The Chairman referred to the proposed dates for the above one-day training session. **Following discussion it was agreed that the training be held on 19 January 2011.**

Post-Meeting Note: The one-day training session is being rescheduled to the beginning of February – date to be confirmed.

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THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS  
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED  
AT 3.10 PM

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