

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

26 MAY 2009

2.00 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Mr J Beattie
Mr J McKeever
Mr R Pollock

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
Miss U Devlin, Corporate Communications Officer
Ms L Brown, DHSSPS
Mr N McCann, DHSSPS
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Chair welcomed Linda Brown, Deputy Secretary, DHSSPS and Noel McCann, Director of Co-Ordination, DHSSPS. He also welcomed the newly appointed Area Commanders who were in attendance as part of their induction.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the new appointees would be taking up their posts on 1 June 2009 and introduced the 4 Area Commanders –

D Ashford – Area Commander (Training & Development);
D Mackay – Area Commander (Southern Area Command);
B McClintock – Area Commander (Operations); and
P O'Reilly – Area Commander (Northern Area Command).

The Chair, on behalf of the Board, congratulated the Area Commanders on their appointments and wished them every success in their new posts.

1 **Apologies**

Apologies were noted.

2 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 April 2009, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Campbell, seconded by Mr Hatch.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Portstewart Fire Station – Removal of Second Fire Appliance

It was noted that this Item would be discussed later in the Meeting.

Fire Safety Legislation

In response to a question from the Chair, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Craig confirmed that the Board response to the Consultation exercise had been submitted. He explained that the Consultation exercise was now completed and outlined the process for taking the Legislation forward. He also explained to Members that, due to the Assembly summer recess, it would be the end of September/beginning of October before the Legislation would be in place.

Pension Entitlement – Widow of late P O'Brien

The Chairman informed Members that, with respect to the request for the reconsideration of the pension paid to Mrs O'Brien under the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Order (NI) 2007, he had advised Mrs O'Brien and the Fire Brigades' Union of the procedure agreed by the Board at its April Meeting. He stated that a written submission from Mrs O'Brien was awaited and explained that a written submission would also be sought from the Chief Fire Officer prior to the Panel being convened to consider the matter.

3 **Audit Committee Meeting**

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit Committee held on 27 April 2009.

4 **Service Support Committee Meeting**

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Support Committee held on 12 May 2009.

5 Remuneration Committee Meeting

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 12 May 2009.

The Chair informed Members that this was the first Meeting of the reconstituted Remuneration Committee and explained that the main purpose of the Meeting had been to formalise the amended constitution of the Committee along with the remit for the Committee.

Mr Hatch referred to the Principal Officers' Pay Review and sought an update on progress. The Chair stated that, while he had not been informed of anything further in relation to the Review, it was his understanding that arrangements have been made for an internal DFP Division to conduct the Review.

Ms Brown informed the Meeting that the Review had not commenced and explained that the Delivery & Innovation Division, a department within DFP, had agreed to conduct the Review. She stated that it was hoped to have a draft Terms of Reference within the next few days and this would be followed by a draft timetable. She added that it was anticipated that the Review would be complete before the summer break.

The Chair referred to comments raised at previous Meetings by Mr Bradley regarding the need for Members to have input into the Terms of Reference.

Mr Bradley explained that he believed that the Board should have input into the Terms of Reference as it was the 'governing body' with responsibility for NIFRS.

Ms Brown stressed the importance of the Review and pointed out that it was the Department that was commissioning the Review and that there would be no problem sharing the Terms of Reference with the Board.

The Chair referred to NIFRS's membership of the National Joint Council and explained the need for a full understanding of that membership to be included as an aspect of the Terms of Reference.

Members noted that the next Meeting of the Remuneration Committee was scheduled to take place on 23 June 2009.

6 Presentation by Deputy Secretary, DHSSPS

Ms Brown thanked the Board for their invitation to join their meeting to give a presentation. She gave Members a brief synopsis of her background within the Civil Service up until her current position of Deputy Secretary, DHSSPS. She introduced Mr Noel McCann who informed Members of his remit within DHSSPS, which included the Public Safety Unit.

Ms Brown explained to Members that, while their invitation had been in the context of the issues surrounding Portstewart, she would have been seeking to make a presentation to the Board regarding accountability and governance similar to the presentations which she had given to the Trust Boards.

Ms Brown then gave a presentation on Accountability and Governance in respect of Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service. At the conclusion of her presentation, Ms Brown stressed the importance of building good working relationships with the Minister and the Department.

The Chair thanked Ms Brown for her presentation but pointed out that Members were expecting more clarification regarding the Board's decision-making powers.

During a full and frank discussion, Members expressed a number of concerns regarding the lack of clarification in respect of the Board's decision-making powers, the role of Board Members and also the structure of the Board as there was an inference that NIFRS would be micro-managed. Ms Brown referred to the comments she had made during her presentation with respect to devolution and the need to recognise the changes it brought. She explained that there was no checklist which could be brought to the Board and that flexibility was the key to the way forward. She also pointed out the need for the Board to be aware of the Minister's views as he was especially interested in issues which gave rise to public concern or had an impact on delivery of a service to the public. She informed Members how matters were currently being taken forward within the Trust Boards. With respect to the structure of the Board, Ms Brown assured Members that there was no question of changing same and reiterated the need for the Board to build working relationships.

At this point
Mr Clarke left the Meeting

The Chair stated that the Board was responsible for the delivery of an emergency service and highlighted that decisions taken previously in respect of the deployment of resources had benefited the people of Northern Ireland as such decisions had enhanced service delivery. He thanked Ms Brown and Mr McCann for their attendance.

7 **Motion to set aside Standing Order 16**

The Board, at its Meeting on 27 January 2009, unanimously resolved *"to approve the Summary of Consultation Exercise, subject to minor amendments, and to recommend that the second appliance be removed from Portstewart Fire Station"*.

The Chair referred Members to Standing Order 16 which states -

“No Motion to rescind any resolution which has been passed within the preceding 6 months, nor any Motion which has been rejected by the Board within the preceding 6 months, shall be accepted unless the Motion shall, in addition to the signature of the Member who proposes such Motion, bear the signatures of 5 other Members; and when any such Motion has been disposed of by the Board, it shall not be competent for any Member to propose a similar Motion within a further period of 6 months.”

He reminded Members of the motion to set aside Standing Order 16 in order to consider its decision in respect of Portstewart, otherwise the Board would not be able to do so until 28 July 2009.

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

Resolved: **“that the Board set Standing Order 16 aside in order to consider the Board decision of 27 January 2009 pertaining to the second appliance at Portstewart Fire Station”.**

8 Consideration of Board Decision of 27 January 2009 regarding Portstewart Fire Station

The Chair circulated a background note in respect of the Portstewart second appliance for the consideration of Members, along with a copy of a letter from Mr R Pollock.

The Chair invited the Chief Fire Officer to comment on the current position at Portstewart as a result of reinstating the second appliance.

The Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that the recommendation pertaining to the second appliance at Portstewart had emanated from the IRMP process and was not directly related to efficiency savings. He advised Members that Portstewart Fire Station had not received any calls since 17 May 2009 and that there had been no incidents of note during the North West 200 week. Members noted that, for the period 2 April to 25 May, Portstewart had received 14 calls and of these the second appliance had only been required on 6 occasions. The Chief Fire Officer pointed out that there had only been sufficient personnel to crew the appliance on 2 of those occasions.

In response to a question from Mr Bradley, the Chief Fire Officer outlined the up-to-date position with respect to the current recruitment exercise for Portstewart.

Members noted options for the way forward as contained in the Chair’s background note. A discussion followed during which Members pointed out that the Board had followed the IRMP process and had made an evidence-based decision which was within their responsibilities and which ensured delivery of an efficient and effective service to the people of Northern Ireland.

Following further discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mr Campbell, seconded by Mr Bradley, unanimously –

Resolved: “the Board is still of the opinion, following intensive review and consultation, that its decision of 27 January 2009 was correct and appropriate. However, cognisant of the views expressed by both the Minister and his Department, the Board has very reluctantly agreed to retain the second appliance in Portstewart indefinitely. This will allow us to return to the issue at some future date, perhaps in conjunction with suggestions for the overall efficiency savings we are required to make. Meanwhile, we are countenancing unnecessary expenditure of £80,000 per annum and we will need to highlight this for governance and audit purposes”.

At this point,
Ms Brown and Mr McCann left the Meeting

9 National Joint Council Matters

Report on Meetings

The Chair informed Members that he had attended a meeting with other Lead Members of the National Joint Council regarding the pay settlement and explained that no agreement had been reached. He stated that negotiations were ongoing at staff level.

Members noted that a meeting of the National Joint Council was scheduled to take place on 3 June 2009.

10 Chair’s Business

The Chair gave Members brief details of his activities since the April Board Meeting.

Operational Assurance Audits

The Chair informed Members of a number of Operational Assurance Audits scheduled to take place during June and encouraged Members to attend. He asked that anyone wishing to attend to advise the Board Administrative Secretary.

11 Chief Fire Officer's Report

The Chief Fire Officer circulated the NIFRS Board Monthly News Brief, May 2009, for the information of Members. He drew Members' attention to the Musical Night which is being hosted by the Band of NIFRS on 11 June 2009 at Fire & Rescue Training Centre and stated that everyone was welcome to attend.

At this point,
Mrs Gilliland left the Meeting

Operational Activities

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of operational activities and incidents of note for the month of April 2009.

Management Accounts

Members noted that, due to the finalising of the year end accounts, normal Management Accounts would not be available until the next Meeting of the Board.

The Chair referred to the Musical Night being hosted by the Band of NIFRS and encouraged Members and Officers to attend.

12 Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

Copy of Financial Auditing and Reporting: 2007-2008
General Report of Auditor & Comptroller General for NI.

13 Sealing of Documents

There were no documents for sealing.

14 Meetings of the Board and its Committees

Members noted a list of Meetings, etc, of the Board and its Committees for the month of June.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 5.00 PM
