

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

28 JUNE 2016

2.30 PM

PRESENT: Ms C McKinney, Chairperson presiding
Mr D Ashford, Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mr J Barbour
Mr C Enright
Mr K Henning
Mr R Irvine
Mr P Martin
Mr G Smyth

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Graham, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Operational Support)
Mr G Thompson, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Operations)
Mrs L Cuddy, Director of Planning, Performance & Governance
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Finance
Mr D Moore, Director of Human Resources
Ms P Wylie, Head of Corporate Communications
Mr S Fitzsimons, Interim Head of Estates
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr J Millar, DoH Observer

Item 1: Apologies

Apologies were noted.

Item 2: Conflicts of Interest

The Chairperson enquired as to whether any Members of the Board wished to declare any potential conflicts of interest with any of the business items on the Agenda. Members confirmed that there were no apparent conflicts of interest.

Item 3: Logistics Support Centre

The Interim Head of Estates gave Members an overview of the proposed Logistics Support Centre project at Boucher Crescent, Belfast, which will encompass NIFRS Transport & Equipment Workshops and NIFRS Stores together with a Communications Workshop and a back-up for NIFRS Regional Control Centre. He gave Members an overview of the funding position for the project.

The Interim Head of Estates updated Members on progress noting that following a full design development process NIFRS is now in the process of procuring contractors. He also noted that CPD Health Projects is managing the procurement process as NIFRS CoPE (Centre of Procurement Expertise) and that as part of the Procurement Strategy it has been agreed with them that the contract be split into 2 distinct parts – Enabling Works Contract and Main Contract.

The Interim Head of Estates outlined the Next Steps and the timelines for the Project. He also highlighted the risks with regards to the Project, ie, no optimism bias allocation until final Business Case stage; rising in costs in construction, particularly within the Mechanical & Electrical sector; unknown site risks; and MIS (IT system) not being in place at handover.

The Chairperson thanked the Interim Head of Estates for his presentation.

During discussion, the Interim Head of Estates answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the information presented.

Mr Enright commented that in a new build situation he believed a ground source heat pump and PV panels should be included as a norm in any public sector building. He explained that they have a combined revenue/cost saving 'payback' respectively of about 3 years and 7 years in larger installations, alternatively fossil fuel systems that were traditionally installed as standard have no payback at all. He emphasised the need to be mindful of the long-term need to drive unnecessary costs out of the estates infrastructure.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance referred to the Procurement Strategy for the Project and explained that approval was being sought to progress the Enabling Works Contract to prevent major disruption to the FRS Training Centre activities ahead of the Main Contract. Members noted a Briefing Note relating to this matter.

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

Resolved: “to award the Enabling Works Contract for the Logistics Support Centre, subject to receipt of a satisfactory Health & Safety Plan in respect of the Construction Phase, to Cleary Contracting Limited at a cost of £196,950.00”.

The Chairperson thanked the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance and the Interim Head of Estates.

At this point,
the Interim Head of Estates left the Meeting

Item 4: Area & District Review

Members noted the Area and District Review.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson expressed his appreciation to the Director of HR, the Corporate Management Team, Area Commanders and his team for all their work. He noted that the Review had been previously presented to the Service Delivery Committee and explained that further work had been undertaken following that Meeting.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson gave a presentation providing Members with a detailed overview of the work undertaken in respect of the Review and the subsequent development of recommendations and next steps.

During discussion, Members commended Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson and his team for all their work and, whilst acknowledging the work which still has to be progressed, welcomed the direction of travel, ie, a single-tier model aligned to RPA.

Mr Henning enquired as to whether a team had been identified to take the Review forward. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson updated Members on discussions regarding same.

In response to comments from Mr Irvine regarding resources and the need to consider establishment and staffing issues, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson noted that work with respect to Resource to Risk was ongoing. He explained that a paper detailing the number of Wholetime personnel required to deliver a more efficient Wholetime Crewing Framework was being prepared for presentation to the Resources Committee. He highlighted that it proposes a reduction of 64 personnel from the existing crewing establishment. He pointed out that the proposal will not impact on public or Firefighter safety.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson provided clarification regarding consultation timelines in response to a query from the Chairperson.

Mr Henning reiterated the importance of establishing a team to take the Review forward and also stated that a communication plan would be key going forward.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Barbour, seconded by Mr Irvine, unanimously approved that NIFRS proceed to develop the preferred option, ie, the single-tier option based around alignment with Council boundaries.

Item 5: Minutes – 24 May 2016

The Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 24 May 2016, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Henning, seconded by Mr Irvine.

Matters arising from the Minutes:

The Chairperson noted that a number of substantive matters arising from the Minutes would be dealt with through the Meeting.

Chairperson's Business

Referring to the matter of Board membership, the Chairperson informed Members that she had raised the issue again at the recent Accountability Meeting and had been advised that the NIFRS Board vacancies were on the Public Appointment Unit's list.

The Chairperson informed Members that, in response to a letter from the Board, she had received correspondence from Mr Hanna wishing the Board well for the future.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 17 December 2015

The Chairperson sought an update with respect to the Working Group considering the matter of confidentiality.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members on the current position explaining that the newly seconded Information Management Project Manager would be incorporating this matter into his work remit. Mr Smyth, a member of the Working Group, indicated his support for same.

The Chairperson stressed this was a priority matter and that the Board would wish to receive regular updates.

Savings Plan 2016/17

The Chairperson referred to the Savings Plan and ongoing concerns with regard to overtime and the challenging targets set to reduce same.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer assured Members that the Corporate Management Team was closely monitoring overtime expenditure.

The Director of Finance updated Members on the measures implemented and also the work ongoing to mitigate overtime expenditure.

Item 6: Reports from Board Committees, including noting of Committee Minutes and adoption of Recommendations

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee - Minutes - 13 May 2016

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee held on 13 May 2016 were noted. It was also noted that the Board, at its Meeting on 24 May 2016, approved the recommendations as contained in the Minutes.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee - Meeting - 16 June 2016

Members noted that a Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee had been held on 16 June 2016 and there were no recommendations emanating from that Meeting. It was also noted that the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented to the next Board Meeting.

Mr Smyth, Chairperson of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, referred to the business discussed at the Meeting and explained that approval of the Annual Accounts had been carried forward to the Special Committee Meeting on 28 June along with the Business Improvement Project update report.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee - Meeting - 28 June 2016

Members noted that a Special Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee had been held that morning prior to the Board Meeting.

Mr Smyth informed Members that a key Item of Business considered had been the Annual Accounts and that the Committee was recommending approval of the final draft of the Annual Report & Statement of Accounts 2015-16 (including the Governance Statement). He noted that the Accounts were not qualified and also noted the position with regard to the Governance Statement and NIAO's Note to the Accounts. Mr Smyth also updated Members with respect to the ongoing Pensions issue and discussions regarding the splitting of the Accounts.

Mr Smyth referred to the Business Improvement Plan and to discussions at the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee and subsequently at that morning's Closed Session Meeting of the Board. He highlighted that it was an area of ongoing concern for the Board and also referred to the Head of Internal Audit's Year-End Assurance Statement and her reason for providing limited assurance.

Mr Smyth explained that the Board had agreed that a Seminar be held on 21 July 2016, with the possible venue being the Fire & Rescue Service Training Centre, the Corporate Management Team and the Lead Officers all to be in attendance for the full day. He gave an overview of the format/information required by the Board for the seminar. He stated that it is critical that these recommendations be addressed and progressed and that the Board is seeking information such as what is needed to aid/ensure progress and what it can do to support and/or assist. Mr Smyth also acknowledged that it was the holiday period but stressed the need to take the matter forward and reiterated the Board's expectation that Directorates be represented on the day.

The Chairperson referred to previous discussions regarding a dedicated resource from BSO to assist with Business Improvement and sought an update.

The Director of Finance updated Members on the current position.

The Chairperson stated that this was a critical matter and stressed the need for urgency to take this forward. She suggested that consideration be given to whether DoH could provide assistance.

During a full discussion, Members reiterated the Board's serious concerns regarding the lack of progress with respect to the Business Improvement Programme hence it was proposed that a seminar be held around Business Improvement with the Corporate Management Team and their Teams being in attendance to provide updates and also to highlight barriers to progress and where the Board can provide assistance.

The Chairperson reiterated the need for a dedicated resource to drive the Business Improvement Plan and that the Board wishes to work with and assist the Corporate Management Team to ensure progress. She acknowledged again that it was the holiday period but stressed the need to go forward. She referred to the meeting with the Permanent Secretary regarding legacy accountability issues and stated that she wished to give a positive update on Business Improvement at that meeting.

Service Delivery Committee - Meeting - 9 June 2016

It was noted that a Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee had been held on 9 June 2016.

Mr Barbour, Chairperson of the Service Delivery Committee, gave a brief overview of the Business discussed and proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be approved by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Irvine.

Service Delivery – Recommendations

- Approval of the recommendations contained within the Briefing Paper relating to NIFRS Prevention and Protection Outcomes, Indicators and Targeted Engagement Activities;
- Approval of the recommendations contained within the Briefing Paper relating to the review of existing Road Safety educational activities within NIFRS;
- Approval of the Collaboration Agreement with SFRS in respect of the procurement of the replacement Command & Control Mobilising and Integrated Communications Control System;
- Approval of proposal in respect of Call Handling Times within NIFRS Regional Control Centre, ie, NIFRS RCC will handle 90% of its emergency calls within 90 seconds of receipt.

Resources Committee - Minutes - 16 June 2016

Members noted that a Meeting of the Resources Committee had been held on 16 June 2016.

Mr Henning, Chairperson of the Resources Committee, provided a synopsis of the Business discussed and proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be approved by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Enright.

Resources Committee – Recommendations

- Approval of Finance Policies, as detailed below, subject to any changes following consultation as appropriate:
 - Contract Management Policy; and
 - Asset Disposal Policy;
- Approval for NIFRS to progress a Wholetime recruitment campaign to address the current and forecasted shortfall of Wholetime personnel required to resource the new Wholetime Crewing Framework; and to progress a detailed costing, budget plan and associated risk analysis for Wholetime recruitment;
- Approval of Voluntary Transfer Policy for Crew Commander to Area Commander subject to consultation.

Remuneration Committee - Meeting - 28 June 2016

The Chairperson noted that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee had been held prior to the Board Meeting.

The Director of HR gave an overview of the Business discussed which included Job Evaluations; pay related matters in respect of Rathlin Volunteer Firefighters; and the HR structural review. He also noted the recommendations emanating from the Meeting.

Ms McKinney proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be approved by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Barbour.

Remuneration Committee – Recommendations

- Approval of regradings of posts as detailed in the Briefing Paper;
- Approval for the implementation of the following in respect of Rathlin Volunteer Firefighters:

With respect to pay progression:

- 1 To confirm individuals on the appropriate rate of pay as detailed;
- 2 To provide back pay to each individual as detailed;
- 3 To ensure the pay progression process for Volunteer Firefighters is reviewed, taking into account the process for Retained employees, and then formally approved.

With respect to temporary promotions:

- 1 That the normal eligibility requirements for temporary promotions should be waived for Rathlin volunteers in order on the basis of operational need;
- 2 Rathlin volunteers should receive the appropriate rate of pay associated with their ongoing temporary promotions;
- 3 The payments set out in the Briefing Paper should be effective from 29 July 2013 as the work has been carried out since that time; and
- 4 A review of the establishment requirements for Crew Commanders and Watch Commanders is completed for Rathlin Island.

Item 7: Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed Members that Julie Thompson, Deputy Secretary, DoH, was moving to the Department of Education and, on behalf of the Board, extended best wishes for the future in her new post. Members noted that Deborah McNeilly will be covering as Deputy Secretary.

The Chairperson reported positively on her attendance at the Bangor Cadets Passing-Out Parade.

The Chairperson noted that both she and the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer had written to the Minister for Health, Michelle O'Neill, on her appointment and also the Health Committee. She further noted that the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer had been invited to attend the Health Committee on 29 September 2016 to brief the Committee on the work of NIFRS, including current work streams, priorities and challenges.

Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool 2015/16

The draft NIFRS Board Governance Self-Assessment submission was noted.

The Chairperson outlined the background and process for developing the submission.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that the format of the submission was prescribed by the Department and that it was a governance requirement.

The Chairperson drew the attention of the Chairs of the Standing Committees to the actions emanating from the exercise.

The Board, on the motion of Ms McKinney, seconded by Mr Enright, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the draft NIFRS Board Governance Self-Assessment 2015/16 submission”.

Board Appraisals

The Chairperson noted that, with respect to her Performance Assessment, she is meeting with the Deputy Secretary on 20 July 2016.

With regard to Members’ appraisals, the Chairperson informed the Board that she had secured an extension for the submission of completed Assessment Forms to August. She thanked those Members who have completed and returned their forms and encouraged any outstanding forms to be returned as soon as possible.

Item 8: Standalone Strategic Items Annual Report & Statement of Accounts 2015/16

The Director of Finance presented the Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2015/16 which had been reviewed by the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee at a Meeting that morning. She gave Members a synopsis of the key points of note within the document noting the Certificate of Auditor & Comptroller General indicating that the Accounts were unqualified but would have a report attached.

Referring to the Remuneration Report contained within the document, the Director of Finance updated Members on the current position with respect to legal advice received in respect of a disclosure. She explained that the amount will still be published and that DoH was aware of the matter.

The Director of Finance outlined the next steps following sign-off of the Accounts.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Smyth, seconded by Mr Henning, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the draft NIFRS Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2015/16”.

Pension Issues

Reinstatement of Child Allowance

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to the reinstatement of Child Allowance.

Members were informed that, under the Firefighters' Pension Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2007, where a member dies leaving a child, a child allowance is payable. A child allowance can continue once the child attains age 17, if the child is undergoing full-time education.

It was noted that NIFRS was paying a child allowance to an individual who became ill and had to postpone their studies. As per legislation the payment of child allowance was ceased due to a period of interruption in their studies. The individual has now resumed their studies and the Board need to decide if payments should resume, despite the break in education.

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

Resolved: “to approve the resumption of child allowance payments to the individual concerned from 23 May 2016; and, as per legislation, not make payment for the period of interruption, ie, March 2016 to 23 May 2016 as set out in the Briefing Paper”.

Delegated Authority – Ill-Health Retirements

A Briefing Paper relating to the delegated Authority to Chief Fire Officer, or designated Officer in their absence, in respect of ill-health retirements was noted.

The Director of Finance outlined the background to the paper explaining that, with all the pension changes and new legislation enacted, it is important to extend the current delegation to incorporate the new legislation hence it is recommended that the existing delegated authority provision is extended to include The New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 and The Firefighters' Pension Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Irvine, seconded by Mr Enright, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve that the existing delegated authority provision in respect of Ill-health Retirements is extended to include The New Firefighters' Pension Scheme (Amendment) Order (Northern Ireland) 2015 and The Firefighters' Pension Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2015”.

Finance Report

The Board noted a Briefing Paper updating Members on the financial position as at 31 May 2016.

The Director of Finance noted the May financial position reported an expenditure overspend of £12k and drew Members' attention in particular to overtime expenditure; ill-health awards/retirements and the revenue contingency budget adjustments made in May.

Referring to the capital budget, the Director of Finance explained NIFRS' opening capital allocation was decreased in May following the circulation of a revised expenditure profile for the Logistics Support Centre. She explained that there was a potential for surplus funding and the Corporate Management Team was currently assessing capital priorities as any surplus must be declared as soon as possible.

The Director of Finance noted the current position with respect to the Pension Software Business Case and highlighted the need to move forward with the project and noted the delay in processing Annual Pension statements.

Members noted an update following an HMRC visit in May to perform an audit inspection. The Director of Finance explained that a further report will be presented at the next Resources Committee Meeting.

Business Cases

Replacement of Powered Respirator Protection Suits

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the Replacement of Powered Respirator Protection Suits (PRPS).

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Graham gave Members an overview of the purpose of the project.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Irvine, seconded by Mr Smyth, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the Replacement of Powered Respirator Protective Suits (PRPS)”.

Business Case for Job Evaluation Arrears

The Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for Job Evaluation Arrears was noted.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Henning, seconded by Mr Enright, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for Job Evaluation Arrears”.

Business Case for the Appointment of Design Team – RCC

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the Appointment of Design Team to develop project scope, technical specifications and drawings for the refurbishment of the Regional Control Centre.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that the Executive Summary had been circulated for information and gave an overview of same and its purpose.

Item 9: Relevant Correspondence

Correspondence received from Mr A Hanna was noted earlier in the Meeting.

Item 10: Documents for Sealing

There were no documents for sealing.

Item 11: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

The Chairperson confirmed that the Meeting of the Board scheduled for 26 July 2016 would not be proceeding and explained that a Meeting of the Board would, however, be held on 2 August 2016. The next full Board Meeting will be held on 27 September 2016.

The Chairperson noted also the Board Business Improvement Seminar to be held on 21 July 2016.

The Chairperson advised Members that a schedule of Board and Committee Meetings for the year was being developed. She thanked all for their attendance.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING ENDED
AT 4.50 PM
