

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

22 MAY 2012

1.30 PM

PRESENT: Dr J McKee, Chairman presiding
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
Mrs P Tally

APOLOGIES: Mr P Craig, Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D Ashford, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Safety Services)
Mr T McGonigal, Director of Finance & Performance
Management
Mrs A Davidson, Head of HR
Mrs C McNally, Corporate Communications Manager
Mr J Tully, 2013 WPFGL Limited
Mr A McGowan, 2013 WPFGL Limited
Mrs I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr D Jordan, DHSSPS

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 Presentation – 2013 WPFGL Limited

The Chairman reflected positively on his attendance at the 2011 World Police and Fire Games hosted by New York.

He welcomed Mr John Tully, Chief Executive, and Mr Alistair McGowan, Head of Marketing & Communication, 2013 WPFGL Limited, to the Meeting and invited them to give their presentation to the Board.

Mr McGowan gave Members an overview of the Games, a biennial event for serving and retired members of the Services, the purpose of which is to promote sport and fraternity within the police and firefighting communities. He highlighted that the Games were the third largest sporting event in the world.

Mr McGowan gave Members a synopsis of the current position, the aims and objectives of the 2013 Games, the focus during 2011 and the focus for 2012. He also gave Members an overview of the challenges for 2013 WPFGL Limited and the potential rewards.

The Meeting acknowledged that the 2013 Games was a huge opportunity for the Services and NI plc.

The representatives from 2013 WPFGL Limited answered Members' questions on various aspects relating to the Games including funding, accommodation and the engagement of volunteers and the voluntary sector.

During discussion regarding accommodation, Members emphasised that there were other great opportunities outside the Greater Belfast area and within rural communities. Mrs Tally also referred to the logistics for transport and highlighted the need to consider opportunities for transport organisations outside of Belfast.

The Chairman noted Members' comments and concerns and acknowledged that whilst the bid for the 2013 Games was on behalf of Belfast, highlighted that anywhere within Northern Ireland was easily accessible. He thanked Messrs Tully and McGowan for their presentation and, on behalf of the Board, extended best wishes for the Games.

At this point,
Messrs McGowan and Tully left the Meeting

4 Minutes – 24 April 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 April 2012, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Carr, seconded by Mr Kerr.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Chairman's Business – Enniskillen

The Chairman informed the Meeting that he had drafted correspondence to Mr Gault. He gave Members a brief overview of the letter which restated the Board's decision with regard to the memorial montage and also asking Mr Gault to consider refraining from holding peaceful protests outside the Fire Station on Drill Nights and indicating that he was willing to meet with Mr Gault again in Enniskillen or to receive a delegation at Headquarters.

The Chairman had stressed to Mr Gault that the decision to replace the original montage with the agreed new memorial had been a Board decision taken in Lisburn and that linking this decision to the local Crew was unjustified and unreasonable.

Members' Appraisals

The Chairman reminded Members to return their completed Forms as soon as possible.

Interim Chief Executive

Members noted that the Chairman would provide an update later in the Meeting.

Chief Fire Officer's Business

Mr J Barbour referred to the comments at the April Board Meeting regarding the identification of the Organisation's top 5 risks and for these to be presented to the Board.

Members were informed that these would be presented to the Service Delivery & Performance Committee at its next Meeting.

Mrs Rice pointed out the need for these risks to be brought to the Board.

5 Reports from Board Committees, including adoption of Committee Minutes

Finance Committee – Minutes – 9 May 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance Committee held on 9 May 2012 were circulated at the Meeting.

Mr Kerr, Chairman of the Finance Committee, reported on the Business discussed at the Meeting which had included the Capital Budget 2012/13, Revenue Budget 2012/13, Overtime Costs, Performance Charts and Fees and Charges. Members were informed that the Committee had recommended approval of the Capital and Revenue Budgets 2012/13 and the annual increase of Fees and Charges.

With respect to the Revenue Budget 2012/13, Mr Kerr informed Members of an issue which had been raised in relation to the financial implications of WPFPG and the Committee had noted the need for NIFRS to commence work on identifying these financial implications. He noted that the Chairman of the Board would be seeking clarification as to whether the Policing Board have had discussions regarding the financial implications for PSNI.

In light of Members' comments regarding the potential resource implications of 2013 WPFPG for NIFRS, **it was agreed that the Chairman of the Board, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford and the Director of Finance & Performance Management would discuss this matter further.**

Referring to the Capital Budget 2012/13, Mr Kerr advised Members that with the finance resources available, NIFRS could only progress Priority 1 projects. He highlighted discussion which had taken place around the matter of new builds and the list of 26 Fire Stations that NIFRS has identified in need of replacement. He stated that the Committee had stressed the need for NIFRS to review its priorities against the 3 key criteria for projects, ie, improved Operational Performance, Invest to Save initiatives and critical Health & Safety. Members noted that the FSEC methodology would also assist in reprioritisation of new builds.

During further discussion relating to replacement Fire Stations, Mr J Barbour explained the need for NIFRS to also consider the matter of Business Cases which were continuing to be progressed although funding would not be available. He further added that consideration needed to be given to the completion of feasibility studies for such projects especially as these had the potential to create unrealistic public expectations.

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance Committee held on 9 May 2012 were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mr Hatch, seconded by Mr Kerr.

In response to a query from the Chairman, the Director of Finance & Performance Management gave the Meeting an update on the current position with respect to the Structural Fire Kit noting that the Business Case had been submitted to DHSSPS and approval awaited. He stated that DHSSPS had been made aware of the need to expedite this matter.

Service Delivery & Performance Committee – Minutes – 11 May 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee held on 11 May 2012 were circulated at the Meeting.

Mr Hatch, Chairman of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee, gave Members a detailed overview of the key Items of Business discussed at the Meeting.

He stated that the Business Planning Process had been discussed with the Committee agreeing the 5 Strategic Issues for the Organisation which had been identified and agreed by the Corporate Management Team along with the associated project management issues. The direction of travel was also agreed by the Committee.

Mr Hatch highlighted that each of the Directors had given the Meeting a synopsis of the key issues within their Directorates which needed addressed and explained that the Committee had been informed of the current position with respect to the Structural Fire Kit (PBI Gold). It was noted that, unfortunately, there will be a period of time when personnel will have both PBI Gold and Kermel (black) fire kits in service at the same time. Members had been assured that whilst there would be different levels of kit in operation within NIFRS, the kit in use met the current standards.

Members noted that the Committee had also received an update on the current position with respect to GD92. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave the Board Meeting a synopsis of associated issues relating to mobilising and GD92, the barriers to progress and timeframes. He assured Members that a Project Plan was in place and work was ongoing.

Mrs Rice referred to a report pertaining to GD92 which had been requested by the Service Delivery & Performance Committee and stressed the importance of Members receiving this information and the need for the key risks and priorities, targets, etc, to be included.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford reiterated that a Project Plan was in place and explained that information on progress was available as Monthly Highlight Reports are prepared with respect to the project. Mr D Barbour stated that it would be useful for Members to receive update reports pertaining to the GD92 Project and the Structural Fire Kit.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford answered Members' questions with regard to various aspects of the GD92 project.

During further discussion in relation to the key risks within each of the Directorates, Members reiterated the need for NIFRS key risks to be identified and presented to the Board, along with its key priorities as part of the Business Planning Process.

The Chairman informed Members that, in future, itemised reports from each of the Directors would be included on the Agenda for monthly Board Meetings.

Mr Hatch reported on other Business discussed at the Committee Meeting which included an update on the Resource Management Implementation Plan, a Summary of NIFRS Business Achievements for 2011/12, NIFRS Health & Safety Policy Statement and Guide which had been reviewed and updated to reflect changes in the Organisation, NIFRS Customer Services Standards and the draft Annual Report 2011/12.

Mr Hatch drew Members' attention to Other Relevant Business discussed by the Committee relating to the appointment of the Director of Human Resources.

At this point,
the Head of HR left the Meeting

The Chairman gave the Meeting an overview of an issue which had been raised with regard to the administration of the Assessment Centre for the post. He advised Members that legal advice had been sought in respect of the matter and that this had indicated the most appropriate way forward would be to run another Assessment Centre.

The Chairman explained written legal opinion had now been received and this had indicated that the Assessment Centre for the post of Director of Human Resources should be re-run. He stated that the Board had 2 options, either facilitate the Assessment Centre internally or through an external provider.

Following a full and frank discussion, **the Board, on the motion of Mr Mack, seconded by Mrs Rice, agreed to proceed as per Legal advice and re-run the Assessment Centre through an external provider.** Members requested that the Deputy Chief Fire Officer and staff brief the external provider with respect to NIFRS requirements.

At this point,
the Head of HR rejoined the Meeting

Referring back to the Minutes of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee, Mrs Rice read an extract relating to the matter of feasibility studies. She referred to comments previously raised by Members in relation to new Fire Stations and the need to revisit the design of Stations, etc. She sought clarification as to whether Members' views had been relayed to the Team involved in this area.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that he would be meeting with Mike Spence, Health Estates, and that he would be raising the matter at that meeting.

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee held on 11 May 2012 were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mr Hatch, seconded by Mr Hanna.

6 Chairman's Business (including National Joint Council Matters)

Posts in Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate

The Chairman referred to the vacant posts of Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs and the Strategic Planning Manager and informed the Meeting that DHSSPS had given approval to proceed with filling the posts. He explained that the original Job Descriptions would apply with a note that the matter is under review.

During discussion, Mrs Tally stressed the importance of investing in the Planning Directorate and to fill the vacant posts to ensure NIFRS planning cycle is effectively progressed.

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

Resolved: **“to proceed with filling the vacant posts of Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs and the Strategic Planning Manager”.**

NJC Matters

Members noted that the Chairman had attended a meeting of the National Joint Council the previous week. The Chairman gave Members an account of the Business discussed particularly in relation to pay freezes, the Pensions' issue and Retained contracts.

At this point,
Mrs Tally left the Meeting

Investigation – Whistleblowing Allegations

The Chairman advised Members of the verbal feedback he had received regarding the initial investigation into Whistleblowing allegations.

Trainee Graduation Ceremony

The Chairman encouraged Members' attendance at the Trainee Graduation Ceremony taking place on 31 May 2012.

Charity Day – 'Be a Hero for a Day'

The Chairman gave Members a brief outline of a Charity Day taking place at Custom House Square, Belfast, on 26 May 2012 to raise money for NI Chest, Heart & Stroke. He encouraged Members to support the event.

Review of Wholetime Recruitment Exercise

The Chairman informed Members that the independent review of the Wholetime Recruitment Exercise would be commencing. He explained that the review would be conducted by Angela Hale of London Fire Brigade and outlined the purpose and status of the review and the potential outcomes.

He also informed Members that, in parallel to the review, DHSSPS will be inviting DARD Internal Auditors to conduct an investigation into the allegations of potential fraud. He stated that the investigation follows on the back of the BSO Report commissioned by the Board.

Mr Carr referred to the potential costs of the review and investigation and, whilst acknowledging that DHSSPS would be meeting such costs, stressed the importance of monitoring the matter.

Interim Chief Executive

The Chairman gave Members an update on the current position with respect to the secondment of an Interim Chief Executive and answered Members' questions.

Mr J Barbour referred to the imminent retirement of the Chief Fire Officer and sought clarification as to whether there was an interim solution for the role of Accounting Officer. The Chairman stated that he had raised the matter with DHSSPS and was awaiting a response.

7 Chief Fire Officer's Business

Members noted the Report on the Chief Fire Officer's Business for the month of April 2012.

Prevention Performance

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave Members an overview of the information presented in respect of Prevention Performance noting that the Minister has given approval for an advertising campaign for NIFRS.

He advised Members of a potential issue with procurement in that DHSSPS have indicated that all procurement needs to be managed through a Centre of Procurement Expertise (CoPE). He stated that clarification had been sought as to whether this would apply to all projects and explained that DHSSPS had confirmed that eventually there would be a CoPE influence for all procurement but have agreed that NIFRS could proceed with a phased approach. He further stated that the new Procurement Guidelines will not impact on the procurement of GD92 or Media Services.

Operational Performance

Members noted the Deputy Chief Fire Officer's Briefing Note relating to Operational Performance. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford answered Members' questions on aspects of the information presented.

HR Performance

The Head of HR gave Members an overview of the current position in relation to the Recruitment & Assessment Selection.

At this point,
Mr D Barbour left the Meeting

With respect to other priority vacancies, the Head of HR referred to the Board's earlier decision to progress the appointment of a Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs and the Strategic Planning Manager, she stated that HR will work to develop and seek approval for the Business Case for advertising these posts. Members noted that it would be at least the beginning of July before the posts would be advertised.

Consultation on the Principles of a Revised Attendance Management Policy for NIFRS

Members noted the Principles of a Revised Attendance Management Policy and the consultation questionnaire which had been circulated for their information and comment.

Members noted that NIFRS had implemented an Attendance Management Policy in 2005 and as a result there has been a notable reduction in shifts/days lost per person, with sickness absence levels at 9.2 days/shifts per person at the end of the 2011/12 financial year.

The Head of HR explained that there are ongoing efforts to further reduce days lost per person due to sickness absence and outlined the background to the Principles of a Revised Attendance Management Policy which had been developed following a review conducted by the Attendance Management Unit. She highlighted the key revisions recommended, particularly the inclusion of the attendance management of the Retained Duty System.

Members were informed that the Principles of a Revised Attendance Management Policy were currently out for consultation. The Head HR advised Members that consultation was due to close on 20 July 2012 and their comments would be welcomed.

NIFRS Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure

Members noted NIFRS Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure which had been circulated for their consideration.

The Head of HR gave Members a brief overview of the revised documentation explaining the Policy and Procedure had been revised to make reference to bribery and to reflect the change to the Designated Officer within Planning & Corporate Affairs (previously Human Resources).

She further explained that approval of the documentation would enable NIFRS to circulate the up-do-date Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure, along with the Minister's letter outlining his position with regard to whistleblowing.

Members noted that arrangements are in place to circulate the letter from the Minister Edwin Poots MLA, 'Your Right to Whistleblow', together with the revised documentation to all personnel. Personnel will also be informed of same through NIFRS Core Brief.

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

Resolved: **“to approved the revised NIFRS Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure”.**

Financial Performance

The Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that due to the finalising of the year-end Accounts, an update on Financial Performance and the normal Management Accounts will not be available until the next Meeting of the Board.

Year-End Accounts – Update

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members an update on the year-end outturn and the Audit of Accounts.

Contracts Awarded

Members noted a list of Contracts awarded for the month of April 2012.

8 Standing Items

NIAO Report – Action Plan

The Board noted that a Progress Report will be presented to Members, in parallel with DHSSPS requirements, at the September Board Meeting.

9 Standalone Strategic Items

Year-End Accounts - Update

The Director of Finance & Performance Management reported on this matter previously in the Meeting.

Resource Management Efficiency Savings Business Case

Members noted the Resource Management Efficiency Savings Business Case.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that the Business Case had been developed following the review and realignment of the current Wholetime Firefighter establishment levels and pertained to the anticipated efficiency savings.

He explained that when the Resource Management project was fully implemented the anticipated efficiency savings would be £602k. He pointed out that only partial savings would be achieved during 2012/13.

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

Resolved: **“to approve the Resource Management Efficiency Savings Business Case”.**

Strategic Outline Business Case for Dunmurry Fire Station

Members noted the Strategic Outline Business Case for Dunmurry Fire Station which proposes to provide appropriate Fire Station facilities for long-term provision of emergency response within the Dunmurry area.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members an overview of the background to the development of the Business Case highlighting that the project proposal had been assessed against NIFRS and DHSSPS Capital Project criteria.

Members noted that NIFRS have identified this project as a priority on its 3-year indicative Capital Plan, previously approved by the Board.

The Officers answered Members' questions with respect to various aspects of the information presented.

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

Resolved: **“to approve the Strategic Outline Business Case for Dunmurry Fire Station”.**

NIFRS Scheme of Delegation

Members were reminded that the Board, at its Meeting on 28 February 2012, had approved NIFRS Scheme of Delegation.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management updated Members on the current position explaining that the Scheme had subsequently been submitted to DHSSPS to be ratified and, to date, a formal response was still awaited.

10 Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

- (a) Letter to the Chairman from a retired NIFRS Senior Officer – the Chairman gave a synopsis of the content of the letter and stated that he would discuss the matter with the Chief Fire Officer;
- (b) Letter to the Chairman from Mr S Gault with respect to Enniskillen Fire Station; and
- (c) Letter from a Watch Commander to NIFRS Audit & Risk Management Committee Members and the Chairman of the Board relating to the Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

11 **Sealing of Documents**

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with:

Western Building Systems Limited – for the provision of Portable Buildings at Various NIFRS Stations;

Wallace Enterprises Limited – Lease of First Floor Offices, Salisbury Square, Harryville, Ballymena.

12 **Any Other Business**

There was no Other Business.

13 **Schedule of Future Meetings**

The Schedule of Future Meetings was noted.

Mr J Barbour suggested the need for consideration to be given to the development of a Schedule for Committee Meetings.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.30 PM
