

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

27 NOVEMBER 2012

12.30 PM

- PRESENT:** Dr J McKee, Chairman presiding
Cllr D Barbour
Mr J Barbour
Cllr M Carr
Mrs S Grant
Ald A Hatch
Ald Mrs G Rice
Mrs P Tally
- APOLOGIES:** Mr A Hanna
Mr C Kerr, Interim Chief Fire Officer
Mr M Kerr
Mr C Mack
- 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
Area Commander J Allen (Southern Area Command)
Mr B McGarry, 2013 WPFG Limited
Mr J Davis, 2013 WPFG Limited
Miss A Maguire, Personal Secretary
Mr D Jordan, DHSSPS

The Chairman welcomed Mr B McGarry, Company Director and Mr J Davis, Sports Delivery Manager, 2013 WPFG Limited; Mr D Jordan, DHSSPS; and Area Commander J Allen to the Meeting.

The Chairman expressed his appreciation to Southern Area Command for hosting the Board Meeting. Area Commander Allen gave a detailed synopsis of the areas covered by Southern Area Command within Counties Armagh and Down and the types of incidents attended by Southern Area personnel, including wildfire and forest.

Area Commander Allen answered Members' queries in relation to training for slurry incidents; shared facilities with NIAS; and how information with regards to incidents is communicated between NIFRS, NIAS and PSNI.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford and Area Commander Allen answered Members' queries in relation to monitoring Retained availability and the management procedures in place for dealing with failures to respond.

Following concerns expressed in relation to NIFRS policies and a request for them to be reviewed, the Chairman outlined the Chief Executive was actively looking at NIFRS policies and meeting with other organisations in relation to best practice.

The Chairman thanked Area Commander Allen for his detailed summary of Southern Area Command and highlighted that from next year Area Commanders would be reporting to the Board once or twice a year on relevant issues.

Item 1: Apologies

Apologies were noted.

Item 2: Declaration of Interests

The Chairman 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.

Item 3: Presentation - WPF 2013

The Chairman invited Mr B McGarry and Mr J Davis, 2013 WPF Limited, to give their presentation to the Board.

Mr McGarry updated Members on the current position of the 2013 Games, including the costs and benefits, the volunteer programme and accommodation.

At this point,
the Director of Finance & Performance Management
entered the Meeting

Mr McGarry circulated a paper highlighting the locations where the games would be taking place.

Mr Davis gave an update on the Sports Delivery Team. Sports Co-ordinators have been identified including 19 from NIFRS.

Mr McGarry highlighted the current status and priorities, and asked that NIFRS continue to support the release of staff for the 2013 Games.

Messrs McGarry and Davis answered Members' queries with regards to the information presented.

In relation to transport to and from the Games especially from rural areas, it was noted that transport passes have been organised and enhanced bus services would be provided by Translink. Mrs Rice outlined that Councils have community buses and suggested 2013 WPF Limited contact the Councils regarding use of the buses.

In relation to A&E cover with the Health Trusts, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford stated he had attended a Civil Contingencies Group Meeting earlier that morning and contingencies and emergency planning for WPFPG was taken into account. Mr McGarry stated a Chief Medical Officer would also be appointed.

At this point,
Mr Hatch entered the Meeting

Following a query from Mr J Barbour with regards to accommodation and costs, Mr McGarry stated 50% of accommodation had been promised to WPFPG and the budget was on target. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford assured Members that plans were in place for accommodation and Deloitte had prepared a report in relation to the costs. Mrs Rice suggested the use of B&Bs as well as hotels.

Mr McGarry stated the WPFPG website included various information relating to the Games and also gives the various contact details.

The Chairman stated the Board would be looking at NIFRS contribution to WPFPG in terms of costs, etc, and thanked Messrs McGarry and Davis for a very informative presentation.

At this point,
Messrs McGarry and Davis left the Meeting.

The Chairman asked Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford to consider the WPFPG policies and procedures to ensure compliance with NIFRS.

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Chairman outlined that shortlisting of the Director of Planning, Performance & Corporate Affairs post would take place following the Board Meeting.

The Chairman informed Members the Interim Chief Fire Officer was currently on sick leave and that a coping mechanism had been put in place - Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford and Area Commander McClintock were providing operational cover in the meantime. He stated he had spoken to Sir Ken Knight with regards to alternative arrangements. The Chairman acknowledged the huge capacity and workload issues currently facing NIFRS and the need to fill a number of key posts, and was mindful that personnel were working to their limit.

The Chairman, on behalf of Members, asked Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford to convey their good wishes to the Interim Chief Fire Officer for a speedy recovery.

Item 4: Minutes – 30 October 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 October 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 D Barbour.

Item 5: Reports from Board Committees, including adoption of Committee Minutes

Audit & Risk Management Committee - Minutes - 13 November 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee held on 13 November 2012, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations contained therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mr J Barbour, seconded by Mr Carr.

Mrs Rice, Chairman of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, outlined the Business discussed at the Meeting including:

Internal Audit Reports - the following internal Reports to be reviewed and re-presented to the Committee - Capital Projects (New Estates); Transport & Engineering Services; Estates - update on progress against recommendations to be presented; Health & Safety - update on progress against recommendations to be presented. It was noted that Health & Safety training for the Board and Senior Managers should be completed annually.

Controls Assurance 2011/12 - subsequent to receipt of Whistleblowing Investigation Reports the Corporate Governance & Risk Management Controls Assurance Questionnaires for 2011/12 are being revisited by the Interim Chief Executive – exercise is ongoing.

HIA Assurance Statement - to be reviewed and updated.

Recommendations Database - Business Risk Register & Internal Audit Validation Exercise - the format and details of these Reports to be reviewed and re-designed to identify current recommendations and also identify level of risk. Also in order to ensure accountability, the lead Director to be identified against each risk.

Interim Statement of Internal Control - noted.

NIFRS Fraud Register and Annual Return - noted. It was also noted that CMT had to ensure openness and transparency, Internal Audit are taking forward investigations relating to allegations concerning FRSTC, the provision of fuel to non-NIFRS vehicles and all subsequent allegations.

Committee Terms of Reference - revised Terms of Reference approved.

SOS Charity - it was noted access to NIFRS fuel supplies had ceased not only with respect to the SOS Charity Bus but also in relation to Red Cross vehicles.

Wholetime Recruitment Overtime Claims - the Interim Chief Executive had updated the Audit & Risk Management Committee on progress following publication of the reports pertaining to the Wholetime Recruitment Exercise –

cross-functional Group established to consider each of the disputed claims individually;
report will be presented to the Audit & Risk Management Committee identifying claims which can proceed and seeking approval for payment (DHSSPS also required);
claims outside project Pay Principles or other Corporate Policies to be considered for potential management action under the Discipline Code.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members there were 140 outstanding overtime claims to be considered. He explained the process was very complex and outside the normal policy; clarification had to be sought from the Project Manager for the Wholetime Recruitment exercise on a number of issues relating to the claims.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that the cross-functional Group met the following week after the Audit & Risk Management Committee Meeting to look at the overtime claims.

Members noted that approval of overtime claims by line managers should be more rigorous.

Members expressed concern that the DARD Report had not been received until 16 October, when the issue of the Wholetime Recruitment Overtime Claims has been outstanding from February 2012.

Following a query in relation to Retained recruitment, the Head of HR explained that a Retained Project Working Group had been set up to look at Retained issues including availability, contracts and recruitment. She stated she had met with the Lead Officer to ascertain if Retained recruitment would commence in December 2012. It had been agreed that the Lead Officer would research Retained recruitment processes in other UK FRSS and that NIFRS would recruit in the meantime under the existing 120 Hour Policy, until the Retained availability and contracts, etc, were reviewed.

Members requested a programme on Retained recruitment, including costs, vacancies, timeframe, to be presented to the Board. The Head of HR would give regular updates to the Board on Retained issues.

Finance Committee – Minutes – 26 October 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance Committee held on 26 October 2012, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record and the recommendations contained therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mrs Tally, seconded by Mr Carr.

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

Operations

The Chairman expressed his appreciation to the following –

- Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford for a comprehensive range of events to mark Road Safety Week (19-25 November);
- DHSSPS/NIFRS senior staff for progress on procurement/CoPE issues;
- Operational staff for NIFRS response to the fire in Altnagelvin Hospital.

Members noted the Chairman and Mr M Kerr had attended the RACE Course at Westland Fire Station on 23 November.

Members noted the Memorandum of Understanding with Red Cross/SOS Projects is to be finalised. It was noted that Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford would meet with representatives from SOS in relation to NIFRS not supplying fuel.

National Joint Council Matters

The Chairman informed Members that a meeting of the 6 “lead” FRSs was held in London on 30 October. The Chairman and Interim Chief Fire Officer were unable to attend due to the NIFRS Board Meeting.

NIFRS Strategic Direction

The Chairman informed Members he represented NIFRS and NI Chairs' Forum at Corporate Governance conferences in Belfast - Agenda NI on 6 November (along with the Interim Chief Executive) and CIPFA on 22 November (along with Mrs S Grant). Mrs Grant highlighted that good feedback had been received following the CIPFA conference on 22 November.

The Chairman informed Members that he attended the Desertcreat Curriculum Conference at Cookstown on 21 November along with Mr Hatch, Mr Kerr, the Interim Chief Fire Officer and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford. Mr Hatch commented positively on the Conference and on the attendance of all the Emergency Services.

The Chairman informed Members he had attended the quarterly meeting with NIAS on 7 November, which had been very informative, and they were looking at sharing best practice.

Key Posts/Staffing Issues

Members noted that recruitment processes for the Director of HR and Director of Planning, Performance & Corporate Affairs posts were progressing.

Retained Recruitment process - was discussed earlier in the Meeting.

In relation to the Media Services Tender, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford to progress a small advertising campaign, in the meantime, if there is a further delay in the appointment of a media provider.

The Chairman informed Members that in relation to NIFRS Band, DHSSPS had agreed for the Band Conductor's fee to be paid.

Staff Morale

The Chairman highlighted that in relation to the morale of HQ Staff, he would liaise with Corporate Communications with regards to a response to the reputational damage. It was noted that morale was very poor at all levels.

The Chairman referred to an anonymous letter received in relation to Support Staff at HQ and their work contribution to NIFRS being overlooked. The letter also referred to Support Staff receiving vicious comments from members of the public following the recent media coverage.

Staff Suggestion Scheme

The Chairman informed Members that the Interim Chief Executive was progressing the Staff Suggestion Scheme and a policy had been drafted.

HQ Christmas Lunch

The Chairman referred to a letter received from NIPSA, on behalf of their members, regarding the removal of the HQ Christmas lunch on the last working day before the Christmas holidays.

The Head of HR informed Members that the discretionary half Christmas shopping day had been raised at CMT and discussed in view of other public bodies and the current climate. In light of this, CMT therefore did not approve the discretionary half day Christmas shopping. The Christmas lunch had also been discussed by CMT. As the catering provision has changed, CMT agreed not to have a lunch but had suggested a complimentary Christmas afternoon tea during the preceding week which would give the Chairman and Interim Chief Executive an opportunity to give a briefing to members of staff.

The Head of HR stated she had received comments from members of staff expressing disappointment at the removal of the Christmas lunch. It was noted that CMT would reconsider the matter of a HQ Christmas lunch.

Following a query in relation to cost, the Head of HR confirmed that staff contributes towards the cost of the Christmas lunch.

Mr J Barbour highlighted that the Fire Brigades' Union would also be sending a letter, on behalf of their members, to the Chairman with regards to the removal of the HQ Christmas lunch.

December Board Meeting

The Chairman queried the necessity for a Board Meeting in December. Members agreed that the Board Meeting would be held on Friday, 21 December 2012 at 10.00 am.

Letter received by DHSSPS

The Chairman referred to an anonymous letter received by DHSSPS and the Minister with regards to a number of allegations against NIFRS. The allegations had not been made known to the Chairman. DHSSPS would carry out investigations into these allegations.

Members expressed concern at DHSSPS not informing them of these allegations and the course of action, as it would leave them unprepared for any responses to queries.

Members agreed that the Chairman write formally to the Permanent Secretary, copied to the Minister and Health Committee, asking for an outline of the allegations and DHSSPS proposed course of action.

Uniform - Dame Mary Peters

The Chairman referred to the proposed uniform for Dame Mary Peters and stated the uniform would be worn by Dame Mary at formal events which she would be representing and promoting NIFRS. He stated the cost of the uniform would be between £400-£500. The Chairman reminded Members that Dame Mary was giving her time to NIFRS on an entirely voluntary basis and that, apart from her patronage of the WPF, she was already acting as a high profile champion for older people as well as lifting the profile of women in the Service.

Item 7: Chief Executive's Business – Directors' Updates

Director of Finance & Performance Management

Members noted the Report from the Director of Finance & Performance Management. The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members an overview of the salient points and answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the information presented.

Mrs Tally queried the impact on the new Community Fire Station at Omagh following the Patton Group going into administration and whether a replacement Contractor would be sought. The Director of Finance & Performance Management stated that all work and payment to Towerbridge had ceased and the contract would be retendered.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management stated there would be significant pressure on next year's budget. He highlighted he had met with Health Estates and had raised at the Strategic Investment Group Meeting in relation to easements for this year.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members the Media Services Tender would be advertised once CPD approval was received.

Mrs Tally referred to short-term assistance to help prepare and finalise smaller Business Cases, which had been raised at a previous Finance Committee Meeting and Board Meeting.

Director of Operations

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operations. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave Members an overview of the information presented.

Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate

Members noted the Report from the Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate. The Chairman referred to the volume of information demanded by Assembly Questions and the significant increase of AQs and FOIs received. This additional workload was having an impact on administrative staff.

Director of Safety Services

The Report from the Director of Safety Services was noted. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave Members an overview of the information presented.

Mrs Rice referred to a number of serious road accidents in her local area and asked if PSNI and NIFRS could promote a joint road safety message. **Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford agreed to contact the local PSNI Area Commander with regards to a joint NIFRS/PSNI road safety message.**

Head of HR

Members noted the Report from the Head of HR which highlighted progress to date with respect to the Recruitment & Selection Schedule. The Head of HR answered Member's queries on the information presented.

In relation to a query from Mrs Rice in relation to Equality & Diversity Training, the Head of HR outlined that a Business Case was progressing for Equality & Diversity Training for staff and Board Members in support of Dignity at Work.

Item 8: Standing Items

DHSSPS & BSO Reports - Combined Recommendations Schedule

Members noted the Interim Chief Executive's report and recommendations emanating from the DHSSPS and BSO Reports.

In relation to Recommendation (ii) of the Interim Chief Executive's report - the Board agrees the Chief Executive's proposal to set up of a committee of executive staff to oversee the work in delivering the recommendations and to nominate a Board Member to sit on the committee - **Members agreed that 2 Board Members should sit on the committee.**

Members noted the contents of the draft Combined Recommendations Schedule. The Chairman highlighted that NIFRS Management response to the recommendations would be forwarded to DHSSPS by 30 November 2012. He highlighted the need for the Board to prioritise the recommendations.

The Chairman referred to Recommendation 7.13 of the Combined Recommendations Schedule and the Head of HR outlined the current Harassment Policy would be superseded by the Dignity at Work Policy.

Mrs Rice referred to Recommendation 6.7 of the Combined Recommendations Schedule and stated this Recommendation had been addressed and it should state that the procedure for reporting fraud is in place and cases are being actively reported to the Audit & Risk Management Committee and DHSSPS.

Members suggested an accompanying letter, along with NIFRS Management Response, highlighting the actions that have been addressed to date, and to highlight that some Recommendations could not be progressed due to constraints outside of NIFRS control, ie, late receipt of the BSO and DARD Reports.

The Chairman and Director of Finance & Performance Management would look at NIFRS Management Response to DHSSPS on 30 November to include the recommendations that have been addressed to date and to highlight that some of the recommendations could not be progressed due to constraints outside of NIFRS control.

In relation to Recommendation (iii) of the Interim Chief Executive's report - **the Board still has to agree the governance arrangements from CMT through to DHSSPS.**

In relation to Recommendation (iv) of the Interim Chief Executive's report - **Members agreed that the Recommendations Schedule would become a standing item on future Board Agendas.**

Desertcreat Project

Members noted the Briefing Note providing an update with respect to the Desertcreat Project.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members a paper would be presented to the Board in relation to a review of the Desertcreat Project Team and to seek Board approval prior to seeking DHSSPS approval to go above establishment to resource the Project Team. It was noted CMT had given approval for the additional resources to be put in place.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management confirmed that funding was in place for the additional resourcing of the Project Team.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford stated the Desertcreat DVD would be made available to Members in the future.

WPF 2013

Members noted a Briefing Note providing an update with respect to WPF 2013.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave a detailed summary of the NIFRS costs for secondment/special projects and facility time and answered Members' queries in relation to the information presented.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford stated that Sports Co-ordinators would be informed of the protocols during November 2012. Days taken as WPFG days would be recorded as special leave and will be applied for and approved by Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford stated that for those taking part in the Games, it had been agreed that sports leave, up to a maximum of 3 days, would be granted.

In relation to the appointment of the WPFG Sports Manager:

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

Resolved: "to approve the appointment of the WPFG Sports Manager and to approve the NIFRS costs and leave, on the proviso that this receives approval from DHSSPS".

It was noted that once the Director of Finance & Performance Management receives approval from DHSSPS, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford would be able to grant leave for the Sports Co-ordinators.

Item 9: Standalone Strategic Items

Fire Safety Legislation

Members noted that 24 out of the 26 Councils had signed a Memorandum of Understanding for granting of powers under Article 13 of The Fire and Rescue Services Order (Northern Ireland) 2006 to Local Council Licensing Departments. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford stated he would continue to lobby the remaining 2 Councils to sign up to the Memorandum of Understanding.

Members noted 1 February 2013 is the go live date for the granting of powers.

The elected representatives from District Councils who sit as Members of the NIFRS Board declared a pecuniary interest and abstained from voting on the motion, therefore, the Board, on the motion of Mrs Tally, seconded by Mrs Grant –

Resolved: "to approve the granting of powers under Article 13 of The Fire and Rescue Services Order (Northern Ireland) 2006 to Local Council Licensing Departments".

Code of Practice - Policing & Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) and District Policing and Community Safety Partnerships (DPCSPs)

Members noted the final version of the Code of Practice for the Exercise of Functions by Policing & Community Safety Partnerships and District Policing & Community Safety Partnerships.

Mrs Rice and Mr Carr declared an interest as they both sit on the PCSP Board.

Members pointed out the need for statutory organisations to sit on the Policing & Community Safety Partnership Board.

Economic Appraisal for Replacement Generators

Members noted the Economic Appraisal for Replacement of 8 Generators.

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

Resolved: "to approve the Economic Appraisal for Replacement Generators".

Economic Appraisal for Installation of New Boiler Systems in Ballymena, Lisburn, Lurgan and Newry Fire Stations

It was noted that the above-mentioned Economic Appraisal would be presented to the next Board Meeting.

Item 10: Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

- (a) Letter to the Chairman from DHSSPS in relation to conducting an investigation into allegations made against NIFRS (which was discussed earlier in the Meeting).

Item 11: Sealing of Documents

There were no documents for sealing.

Item 12: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

Members were reminded the December Board Meeting would be held on Friday, 21 December at 10.00 am.

Post Meeting Note: Members were subsequently informed that the Meeting would be held at 9.30 am on Friday, 21 December.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.30 PM
