

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

22 JANUARY 2013

1.30 PM

PRESENT: Dr J McKee, Chairman presiding
Mr C Kerr, Interim Chief Fire Officer
Cllr D Barbour
Cllr M Carr
Mrs S Grant
Mr M Kerr
Mrs P Tally

APOLOGIES: Mr J Barbour
Mr A Hanna
Ald A Hatch
Mr C Mack
Ald Mrs G Rice

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wallace, Interim Chief Executive
Mr D Ashford, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Safety Services)
Mr D Moore, Director of Human Resources designate
Mr R Hanna, Capital Accountant
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr S Torrie, HM Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue
Authorities (Scotland)
Mr B Sweeney, Chief Fire Officer, Strathclyde Fire & Rescue
Service

The Chairman welcomed Mr David Moore, NIFRS newly appointed Director of Human Resources, Mr Steven Torrie, HM Chief Inspector of Fire & Rescue Authorities (Scotland) and Mr Brian Sweeney, Chief Fire Officer of Strathclyde Fire & Rescue Service to the Meeting.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Board, extended his condolences to Mr J Barbour on the death of his mother.

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: DHSSPS & BSO Reports – External Overview

The Meeting noted that following the publication of a number of external reports/investigations into NIFRS, the Board had agreed that an external independent overview of all the reports should be undertaken in order to consider the wider organisational implications of the reports. The Chairman invited Messrs Torrie and Sweeney, who had completed the review, to present their report to the Board.

Messrs Torrie and Sweeney noted the background to the External Overview and how the Review was taken forward. They gave Members a detailed overview of the recommendations emanating from the Review, particularly with respect to short-term and longer-term strategic reviews of NIFRS. They drew Members' attention to 4 key management actions which should be addressed, through an interim review, as an immediate priority –

- A Cultural Audit of NIFRS;
- An Audit of the Financial Support Structure;
- An Audit of the Human Resources Support Structure; and
- An assessment of the relationships between Staff, Unions and the Board.

They explained that this interim review would feed into a full and strategic review of NIFRS over the following 18-24 months.

The Chairman reminded the Meeting that the NIFRS Board is charged with the responsibility for delivering a fire and rescue service to the public and including a responsibility to educate the public regarding fire. He highlighted that NIFRS was delivering against its KPIs and hoped that this would give confidence to the Minister and the public.

Referring to the overview of the issues contained at Section 3 of the report, the Chairman acknowledged the over-arching issues which the Board and the Corporate Management Team needed to work together to address.

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At this point,
Mrs Tally entered the Meeting

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Members welcomed the External Overview report and during a full discussion, Messrs Torrie and Sweeney answered Members' questions on various aspects of the report presented, particularly in relation to cultural change and how to take that change forward.

In response to a question from Mr Kerr regarding how to address unresolved grievances, disciplinary issues, etc, Messrs Torrie and Sweeney explained the need to separate these processes from the interim review and for the Board to set in place appropriate mechanisms which will ensure that whilst action on both processes may be undertaken concurrently, the 2 remain wholly and entirely separate.

Mr Kerr referred to local MLAs seeking accountability and their view that there was a need for disciplinary action. Messrs Torrie and Sweeney reiterated their conclusion that there is little evidence to support any widespread disciplinary concerns, although it was for the Board to determine whether formal disciplinary action is appropriate.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman and the Interim Chief Executive would meet with the Minister and Permanent Secretary to relay the outcome of the External Overview specifically in relation to the discipline issue.

During further discussion around cultural change, Messrs Torrie and Sweeney pointed out the need for the Board to take a leading role, working with the Interim Chief Executive and the Senior Management Team, in engaging with the strategic review and promoting the values and purpose of the Service. Mr Torrie commented on his experience highlighting that Highlands & Islands was a good model of strong leadership at Authority level.

The Chairman thanked Messrs Torrie and Sweeney for their contribution and their report acknowledging the benefits of the external overview to the Board and the Corporate Management Team. He also acknowledged the work ahead for NIFRS in addressing the issues and moving forward in a strategic direction. He explained that he would welcome Messrs Torrie and Sweeney re-visiting NIFRS at a future date.

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At this point,
Messrs Torrie and Sweeney
left the Meeting

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The Chairman proposed that the Meeting be adjourned for a 10 minute break. This was agreed.

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THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 1.50 PM
AND RECONVENED AT 2.00 PM

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Change in the Order of Business

It was agreed to take Item 7 - Chief Executive's Business – Directors' Updates – Finance Directorate Report – as the next Item of Business

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

Finance Directorate Report

The Chairman informed Members of the current staffing position with the Finance Directorate given the absence, due to illness, of the Director of Finance & Performance Management. He expressed his appreciation to Mr Hanna and the staff within the Finance Directorate for all their work.

Members noted the Management Accounts Report for the period 1 April to 31 December 2012. The Capital Accountant gave Members an overview of the salient points in respect of the Revenue Budget. He informed Members that in the December Monitoring Round, NIFRS had declared an easement of £2½m to DHSSPS and highlighting the key areas concerned.

Referring to the Capital budget, the Capital Accountant informed Members that an easement of £3½m had been declared. Members noted a detailed analysis of the Capital budget position which included a figure of £2.2m due to the recent drop-out of a main contractor for the Omagh project.

The Chairman expressed his concern regarding the Capital budget position and noted the lack of progress with respect to a Local Operating Agreement with CPD to act as CoPE for NIFRS.

The Interim Chief Executive updated Members on the current position with respect to securing a Local Operating Agreement with CPD. Members noted that the GD92 and Media Services tender documentation is currently with CPD and the Interim Chief Executive explained that NIFRS, through DHSSPS, were putting pressure on CPD to progress these projects as a priority.

The Chairman expressed his concern in relation to the lack of progress particularly with respect to Media Services given NIFRS statutory responsibility to educate the public. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford assured Members that while the situation was not ideal, NIFRS had contingencies in place.

Members noted that the Management Accounts would be considered in detail by the Finance Committee at its Meeting on 1 February 2013.

In response to Members' questions, the Officers updated Members on the current position with respect to PBI Gold and the new Omagh Fire Station. Members noted that the Corporate Management Team would be considering NIFRS Capital programme the following week to reaffirm priorities.

During further discussion, the Officers answered Members' queries in relation to various aspects of the information presented. The Chairman expressed concern in relation to the injury/ill-health expenditure and asked that further details be presented to the Human Resources Committee for consideration.

The Chairman sought clarification regarding the development of Business Cases pertaining to the Desertcreat and WPFPG projects. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford explained that in November DHSSPS had indicated that they were content that there was no need for a Business Case for the WPFPG project. With respect to Desertcreat, he explained that an enhancement to the Project Team was being proposed and once costed would be presented to the Board for consideration.

The Chairman reiterated the Board's total commitment to the Desertcreat and WPFPG projects but stressed the need for adequate reporting throughout the projects.

The Chairman reiterated his appreciation to Mr Hanna for all his work.

Director of Operations – Briefing Note Exercise ‘Overflow’

Members noted a Briefing Note on Exercise ‘Overflow’. The Interim Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of the Exercise which will test EU and UK mutual aid with Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service and also explained that the public safety enhancing exercise will test NIFRS operational response to a major flooding incident. The Exercise will run continuously for a 12-hour period and will simulate a flooding event following 3 days of heavy rain. Members noted that a number of scenarios had been developed and each Area Command will be involved in responding to these scenarios during this Exercise.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer highlighted that approximately 200 people will be involved in a variety of roles from the statutory, government and voluntary sector and the Exercise will include cross-border co-operation and mutual aid from England.

Referring to the anticipated costs of £36k for the Exercise, the Interim Chief Fire Officer assured Members that the cost was within NIFRS delegated limits and that funding had been accrued for the training exercise. Members noted that the appropriate Economic Appraisal had been completed and, with respect to sundries, had been approved by the Corporate Management Team. He stated, however, that the overtime costs had been challenged and explained that the £32k overtime costs related to a baseline number of staff up to the appropriate rank. He indicated that he was content to share the Economic Appraisal with Board Members.

The Capital Accountant confirmed that the Economic Appraisal met all the necessary requirements.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer stated that should any Members wish to attend the Exercise to discuss same with him.

Item 3: DHSSPS & BSO Reports – External Overview

Members noted the Report on the External Overview of Recently Published Investigation Reports and the recommendations contained therein.

At this point,
the Capital Accountant left the Meeting

In response to a question from Mrs Tally regarding addressing the recommendations within the report, the Interim Chief Executive explained that the recommendations from the External Overview will be incorporated in the overall change programme which is being developed for Board consideration.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs Tally, seconded by Mr D Barbour, agreed that the Interim Chief Executive prepare a report for the next Board Meeting on taking forward the External Overview's recommendations.

Mrs Tally reiterated the need for the Minister to be aware that NIFRS were taking on board the recommendations contained within the External Overview report particularly with respect to expectations regarding disciplinary action.

The Interim Chief Executive noted DHSSPS comments with regard to the content of the External Overview report. He reminded Members that at the Health Committee Meeting he had indicated that it was his professional view that there was no evidence to progress disciplinary action at this time although this did not exclude action being taken in the future. He added that action to resolve outstanding grievances and complaints remained a priority.

The Interim Chief Executive acknowledged that the Overview Report was helpful in that taking all recommendations into account and considering the organisational impact, it does provide a more strategic overview of how the Organisation can move forward, as well as addressing the weaknesses highlighted by the reports. He reiterated that a holistic approach to the overall change programme is being developed for the consideration of the Board.

In response to a question from Mr Kerr, the Interim Chief Executive updated Members on progress with respect to the outstanding grievances. He answered Members' questions on aspects of the matter.

Item 4: Minutes – 21 December 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 December 2012, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Carr, seconded by Mrs Grant.

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

Audit & Risk Management Committee – Special Meeting – 17 January 2013

Members noted that a Special Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee had been held on 17 January 2013. Mrs Grant, Vice-Chairman of the Committee, explained the Meeting had been convened to consider 2 specific items of Business, ie, NAO Audit Committee Self-Assessment Checklist 2011/12 and the Report to those Charged with Governance and gave Members a synopsis of the business discussed.

NAO Audit Committee Self-Assessment Checklist 2011/12

Mrs Grant informed Members that at the request of DHSSPS, NIFRS Audit & Risk Management Committee is required to complete the NAO Audit Committee Self-Assessment Checklist 2011/2012.

Mrs Grant explained that, at the Meeting, a draft Checklist prepared by the Chairman of the Committee and Head of Internal Audit had been considered in detail. She further explained that the Committee had felt that, in light of recent external reports and audits, there were issues which needed to be addressed within the document, it should be considered by the Board.

Mrs Grant informed Members that a further Meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place the following week and invited Members' comments.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mrs Tally, endorsed the actions of the Audit & Risk Management Committee. Members were requested to forward any comments to the Board Administrative Secretary by 29 January 2013.

Report to those Charged with Governance

Members noted that the Report to those Charged with Governance (RTTCWG) arising from the audit of NIFRS 2011-12 Accounts had been formally issued by the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO).

Mrs Grant explained that the matters contained within this RTTCWG had previously been communicated to NIFRS and were the same ones discussed by the Audit & Risk Management Committee at its Meeting held on 26 June 2012. She stated that NIAO were formally issuing the RTTCWG having seen the outcomes of the DHSSPS investigations.

Members noted that although work on the Accounts was completed in June 2012, the audit still has to be certified due to the ongoing issues within NIFRS. NIAO will certify the Accounts when their report on the Accounts has been finalised which it is intended should be done in the coming weeks.

The Chairman sought clarification as to the current position in relation to the publication of NIFRS Annual Report given the Accounts had not, as yet, been signed off.

The Interim Chief Executive noted that NIFRS had a statutory requirement to publish an Annual Report and Statement of Accounts. He explained that the Report was ready for publication and that consideration was being given to publishing the Report with the caveat that the Statement of Accounts required to be signed off. The Report would be published on NIFRS website with a limited number of 'hard' copies being produced.

Remuneration Committee – Minutes – 5 December 2012

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 5 December 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 Kerr, seconded by Mrs Tally.

The Chairman gave Members an overview of the key items of Business discussed. He drew Members' attention to Item 6 relating to honoraria for Planning & Corporate Affairs staff and explained that, in the absence of a policy, the Committee had deferred making a decision on this matter.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Pay Remits – Wholetime Firefighters – Watch Commander Rank to Role Issue

The Interim Chief Fire Officer referred to the outstanding Watch Commander rank to role issue which related back to the rank to role assimilation process which had taken place during 2005/2006 and reminded Members of the background to the decision to re-grade 28 posts previously graded at Watch Commander 'A' rates to Watch Commander 'B' rates following the outcome of outstanding Grievances. He noted that the Board had supported this decision and also DHSSPS. He informed Members that DHSSPS were now seeking a Business Case in respect of the outstanding payments.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer updated the Meeting on the Watch Commander appellants' position and that of the Fire Brigades' Union explaining that the appellants were considering taking further action. He advised that a Business Case was being developed and assured Members that the Organisation was discharging its responsibilities.

The Chairman sought an update with respect to the outstanding overtime claims relating to the Wholetime Recruitment exercise. The Meeting noted that the Sub-Group set-up to consider each individual claim had met and also noted that a significant number of the outstanding claims had been progressed. The Chairman stressed the need to resolve the remaining claims. **It was agreed that an update on the outstanding claims be presented to the Audit & Risk Management Committee.**

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

Board Governance Self Assessment Tool

The Chairman informed the Members that all DHSSPS sponsored Arms Length Bodies are being required to comply with a new Board Governance Self Assessment Tool. He explained that he had established a small Working Group consisting of Mr Hanna, Mr Mack, the Head of Internal Audit, Corporate Services Manager and Board Administrative Secretary to progress this issue.

The Chairman gave Members a brief overview of the document and how it will be taken forward. He added that Members' feedback would be welcomed.

Board Training Needs

The Chairman circulated a list of suggested areas for training for the consideration of Members.

Following discussion, the Members agreed that training in the undernoted areas be progressed:

- **Fraud Awareness;**
- **Change Management;**
- **Accountability/Scrutiny; and**
- **Risk Management.**

The Chairman and the Board Administrative Secretary to progress a Business Case for the relevant training.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer highlighted that training for senior managers had been planned and stated Board Members were welcome to attend. He added he would forward the training dates for senior managers to the Board Administrative Secretary for circulation to Board Members.

The Chairman explained that he would be keen to share Board training with the NIAS Trust Board. Members supported the Chairman's proposal.

HSC(F) 2011-20 Addendum – Remuneration of Independent Board Members who are Public Sector Employees

Members noted a copy of the Addendum to Circular HSC(F) 2011-20 concerning the remuneration of independent Board Members who are public sector employees.

Mrs Tally confirmed that there is no conflict between her own work within the Southern Health Trust and her appointment to the Board of NIFRS.

Annual Business Plans

The Chairman noted a letter from DHSSPS reminding NIFRS of requirements for 2013-14 Annual Business Plans to be submitted by 31 March 2013.

Public Accounts Committee

The Chairman informed Members that NIFRS had been invited to attend the Public Accounts Committee on 24 April 2013.

Leading Firefighter J McCloskey (Deceased)

The Chairman advised Members that he was planning to meet with the McCloskey family on 2 February 2013.

NIFRS Band

The Chairman informed Members of correspondence received from the Honorary Secretary of the NIFRS band.

NJC Matters

It was noted that the Chairman would be attending a meeting of the National Joint Council on 25 January 2013.

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

Director of Operations

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operations. The Interim Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of the information presented with respect to Operational Performance, Operational Assurance and Audit and Operational Issues of Note.

Referring to Operational Risk Analysis, the Interim Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the Warwickshire judgement, the Operations Management Framework, Operations Management and Safety Project, Dunmurry Strategic Outline Case and the G8 Summit.

Members also received a verbal update on emergent issues and control measures.

Director of Safety Services

Members noted the Report from the Director of Safety Services. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave the Meeting an overview of the salient points from his Report in particular he commended the Team from Northern Area Command who had undertaken a pilot scheme with Northern Trust aimed at providing enhanced Fire Safety for people with sensory impairment. The NIFRS team were runners up in a DHSSPS competition as a result. Members noted that NIFRS are looking to see if this programme can be replicated elsewhere.

With respect to Fire Safety legislation, Members were informed of the current position in relation to prosecutions.

Desertcreat Project

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

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford updated Members on progress with respect to the procurement process.

The Chairman informed Members that Mrs Grant would be representing NIFRS on the Desertcreat Confidence Recovery Committee.

WPFG 2013

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

At this point,
Mrs Tally and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford
left the Meeting

Director's Reports

Members noted the report from the Head of HR updating Members on NIFRS recruitment and promotions schedule.

Members also noted the Planning & Corporate Affairs report and the Interim Chief Executive gave Members an overview of the salient points in relation to Estates, Procurement, Planning and Business Improvement. He noted the high level of Assembly Questions which NIFRS dealt with during November and December and pointed out the additional work involved in dealing with additional information requests. He reminded Members that the refurbished Rathfriland Fire Station would be formally opened 26 January 2013.

Item 8: Standing Items

DHSSPS & BSO Reports - Combined Recommendations Schedule

Members noted the draft Audit Recommendations Progress/Accountability Process setting out the details of how progress against actions developed from external audit report recommendations will be monitored and reported upon within NIFRS.

The Interim Chief Executive gave an overview of the background to the document highlighting the recommendations reporting structure and schedule. He noted that, as agreed previously, 2 Members of the Board would serve on the Organisation Improvement Committee and informed the Meeting that Mrs Grant and Mr Kerr would be serving on the Committee.

The Chairman stressed the need for NIFRS to progress the recommendations and to demonstrate it is moving forward.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mr D Barbour, approved the draft Audit Recommendations Progress/Accountability Process.

Desertcreat Project

Update provided earlier in the Meeting.

WPFG 2013

Update provided earlier in the Meeting.

Item 9: Standalone Strategic Items

National Frameworks for Fire and Rescue Services

Members noted a paper by the Interim Chief Executive relating to National Frameworks for Fire & Rescue Services.

The Interim Chief Executive referred to the Frameworks for the Scottish and English Fire & Rescue Services previously circulated to Members and noted that the documents were different in content but in strategic terms have been designed to ensure the delivery of a fit for purpose Fire & Rescue Service. He explained that a Framework would set out the Government's priorities and objectives for NIFRS and would be a useful addition to its governance framework.

Members noted that the Interim Chief Executive has had some discussions with DHSSPS regarding a National Framework for NIFRS and had shared the Scottish and English documentation with DHSSPS.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs Grant, seconded by Mr Kerr, supported the Interim Chief Executive continuing discussions with DHSSPS about the possibility of developing a National Framework for NIFRS.

Board Governance Self Assessment Tool

This Item was discussed under Chairman's Business.

Board Training Needs

This Item was discussed under Chairman's Business.

DCLG Efficiency Review

Members noted a report from the Interim Chief Executive pertaining to the operational efficiency review of services delivered by English Fire & Rescue Authorities to be conducted by the outgoing Government Chief Fire & Rescue Adviser, Sir Ken Knight.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that the areas to be covered within the Review have a strong correlation with the work that NIFRS are likely to be undertaking in moving forward with some of its change initiatives. He stated that whilst NIFRS are not part of this formal review process, it is important that NIFRS monitors the outcome of this piece of work.

The Chairman referred to Sir Ken Knight's imminent retirement and suggested that an invitation be extended to Sir Ken to join a future NIFRS Board Meeting, possibly in April, to share his views on where a modern Fire & Rescue Service should be heading in the years ahead and also to share his findings from the Review.

Business Cases

Members noted the following Business Cases –

- Incident Command Training (1 January-31 March 2013);
- Specialised Operational Training Services (1 April 2013-30 March 2016);
- ICT Hardware;
- Boiler Maintenance;
- Insurance Cover.

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

Resolved: “to approve the aforementioned Business Cases”.

Bank of Ireland Business On Line Agreement

Members noted that in order to ensure efficient business continuity within the Finance Department, particularly in relation to administrators on NIFRS Bank Account, approval was being sought for NIFRS to undertake a Business On Line Agreement with Bank of Ireland for replacement administrator passwords to be issued by telephone as opposed to the current postal method.

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

Resolved: “to approve NIFRS undertaking a Business On Line Agreement with Bank of Ireland”.

Item 10: Relevant Correspondence

The following relevant correspondence was noted:

Invitation from the Equality Commission for NI to ‘Transgender Issues, Good Practice in Employment Seminar on 7 February 2013.

The Chairman stated that he would be attending the seminar and suggested that consideration be given to the possibility of the Equality Manager also attending.

Post Meeting Note: The Head of HR was presenting at the Seminar.

Item 11: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with:

Transport Supplies (NI) Limited – Filters;
Renault UK Limited – Large Van and Large Mechanic's Van; and
Peninsula Print & Design – Safety Team School Packs.

Item 12: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.40 PM
