

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

26 MARCH 2013

1.30 PM

PRESENT: Dr J McKee, Chairman presiding
Mr C Kerr, Interim Chief Fire Officer
Cllr D Barbour
Mr J Barbour
Cllr M Carr
Mr A Hanna
Ald A Hatch
Mr M Kerr
Mr C Mack

APOLOGIES: Mrs S Grant
Ald Mrs G Rice
Mrs P Tally

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wallace, Interim Chief Executive
Mr D Ashford, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Safety Services)
Mr D Moore, Director of Human Resources
Mrs B Rennick, Interim Director of Finance & Performance
Management
Mrs U McCambridge, Acting Corporate Communications
Manager
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr D Jordan, DHSSPS

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: Minutes – 26 February 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 February 2013, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Mack, seconded by Mr D Barbour.

Arising out of the Minutes:

**Minutes – 22 January 2013 –
DHSSPS & BSO Reports – External Overview**

The Chairman noted that he and the Interim Chief Executive would be meeting with the Minister the next day regarding the outcome of the External Overview.

**Chairman's Business –
The Role of the Board**

The Chairman referred to the discussions at the February Board Meeting regarding the role of the Board and reiterated that he was happy to discuss Members' views.

Item 4: Reports from Board Committees, including adoption of Committee Minutes

**Audit & Risk Management Committee –
Minutes – 21 February 2013**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee held on 21 February 2013, 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 D Barbour.

**Audit & Risk Management Committee –
Meeting – 26 March 2013**

Members noted that a Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee had been held that morning and a report on the business discussed will be provided at the next Board Meeting.

Service Delivery & Performance Committee – Minutes – 12 March 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee held on 12 March 2013, 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 M Carr, seconded by Mr J Barbour.

Mr Hatch, Chairman of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee, gave Members an overview of the Business discussed at the Meeting which had included presentations on the Driving Change Project and NIFRS Operational Risk Management Strategy; updates on IRMP, Operations Management & Safety Project; Health & Safety; Fire Safety; Technical Development and Training & Organisational Development. He informed the Meeting that the Committee had also received an ICT update and highlighted that CPD have indicated that they were content for NIFRS to issue the Tender documentation for the GD92 project.

He added that the Interim Chief Fire Officer had updated the Committee with respect to Operational Planning particularly in relation to the G8 Summit and the Retained Availability Monitoring System.

Members noted that the Committee had also received NIFRS Performance Report April-December 2012; Benchmarking Performance Report Family Group 4 (3rd Quarter April-December 2012) and 6-Month Summary of Informal and Formal Operational Service Delivery Complaints.

The Chairman of the Board referred to the operational planning for the G8 Summit and sought clarification as to the potential costs for NIFRS.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer gave Members a synopsis of key progress to date in respect of NIFRS operational planning for G8 Summit and advised the Meeting that indicative overtime costs were £300k. He also outlined how NIFRS proposed to resource the event and explained that this will have an impact on NIFRS business planning process.

During discussion, the Interim Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions relating to various aspects of NIFRS' planning for the G8 Summit, including seeking reimbursement of costs and assistance nationally.

Arising out of the Minutes:

NIFRS Corporate Plan 2013-16 and Annual Business Plan 2013/14

Members noted that the Service Delivery & Performance Committee, at its Meeting on 12 March 2013, had considered the draft NIFRS Corporate Plan 2013-16 and Annual Business Plan 2013/14. The Committee had approved the Corporate and Annual Business Plans subject to amendments.

Members noted a copy of the final NIFRS Corporate Plan 2013-16 and Annual Business Plan 2013/14.

The Interim Chief Executive expressed his appreciation to all those involved in developing the Plans for their work. He noted that NIFRS had worked closely with colleagues from DHSSPS during the process and outlined the background to the development of the Corporate and Annual Business Plans.

Members noted that the Strategic Context for the Corporate Plan had not been developed as yet as the Interim Chief Executive had considered it prudent to delay this until after the Health Committee Meetings.

In response to a question from Mr Kerr regarding budget reductions, the Interim Chief Executive explained that NIFRS had commenced its planning using a flat budget position as the starting point. He further explained that NIFRS is required to prepare an Efficiency Plan by June. He noted that this would be a huge challenge for the Organisation, one which could have a significant impact.

The Chairman concurred acknowledging that that the next financial year was going to be a challenging year for NIFRS and stating that he was confident that as a Board and Executive will be able to address same.

Change in the Order of Business

It was agreed to take Item 6 Chief Executive's Business – Directors' Updates – Director of Safety Services – as the next Item of Business.

Item 6: Chief Executive's Business - Directors' Updates

Director of Safety Services

Members noted the report from the Director of Safety Services. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave Members an overview of the salient points within his Report particularly in relation to GD92. He informed Members that CPD have given approval to issue the Tender documentation. Members noted that documentation will be issued this week.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford explained that, although there was some progress with respect to GD92, it remained a top risk for the Directorate. He further explained how the project will be taken forward with work prioritised as appropriate.

In response to a question from Mr Hatch, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford confirmed that all CoPE requirements had been met.

Members noted that Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford had met with HSENI with the aim of developing a Memorandum of Understanding for response to Carbon Monoxide risks. The current position with respect to the Occupational Health Business Case was also noted.

Desertcreat Project

Members noted a Briefing Note pertaining to the NI Community Safety College. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford updated Members on the current position.

WPFG 2013

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

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that a Memorial Service would be held at 6.30 pm on 4 August 2013 at St Anne's Cathedral and noted that invitations will be issued in due course.

He also informed Members that the WPFG Conference was scheduled to take place from 31 July to 1 August 2013 and explained that the Corporate Management Team had agreed to fund places at the Conference for NIFRS Senior Management and Board Members.

In response to questions from Members, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford outlined progress to date in relation to the process for appointing volunteers and registrations for the Games.

Human Resources Committee – Meeting – 22 March 2013

It was noted that the Meeting of the Human Resources Committee scheduled to take place on 22 March 2013 had been postponed.

Item 5: Chairman’s Business (including National Joint Council Matters)

The Chairman informed Members of the resignations of the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management and the Business Improvement Manager. On behalf of the Board, he thanked Mrs Rennick and Mr Miller for all their work and extended best wishes in their new jobs.

The Chairman noted that the interviews for the post of Director of Planning, Performance & Corporate Affairs were scheduled to take place on 28 and 29 March 2013.

Health Committee

The Chairman reported on the attendance at the Health Committee on 20 March 2013. He thanked Mrs Rice and the Interim Chief Executive for their attendance.

Members noted that the outcome of the Health Committee was awaited.

The Interim Chief Executive commented on the lack of opportunity to focus on what the Organisation has achieved and delivered. He stated that he was hopeful that NIFRS would have an opportunity to reinforce what the Organisation has achieved and continues to deliver.

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

Referring to the Public Accounts Committee Hearing, the Interim Chief Executive noted that briefing sessions had already taken place with DHSSPS, with further sessions planned.

Mr J Barbour, whilst acknowledging Mrs Rice and Mrs Grant were not in attendance at today’s Meeting, expressed his outrage at the treatment of Mrs Rice. He stressed the need for the Board to robustly challenge any request for an individual Board Member to attend such a forum.

Mr D Barbour indicated that Mrs Rice had the support of the Board and stressed that the Audit & Risk Management Committee worked well as a Committee and a team and pointed out that the Members of the Committee were prepared to challenge and to highlight areas of improvement.

During further discussion, Members concurred with the comments raised and suggested that should a similar situation arise, the Board should discuss the appropriateness of such a request. Mr Hatch noted that Mrs Rice had raised her concerns regarding her attendance at the Health Committee at the Special Meeting on 12 March 2013 and acknowledged that the Board should have challenged that request.

The Chairman noted Members' concerns and suggested that the Board raise its concerns when the present process is complete.

Members' Appraisals

The Chairman informed Members that copies of their Performance Assessment Forms for the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 would be circulated for completion in advance of the April Board Meeting.

Board Succession

The Chairman informed Members that Mrs Tally's and Mr Hatch's terms of office would end in September 2013 and that he had notified DHSSPS accordingly.

He referred to potential changes to other Members' circumstances and stated that it would be appreciated if Members would raise these now.

Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry (Francis Report)

The Chairman referred to a letter from the Permanent Secretary with respect to the publication of the Report on the Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Public Inquiry – the Francis Report. He read an extract from the letter outlining a number of serious organisational failings at the hospital.

The Chairman circulated a 'discussion topics' template emanating from the Report to facilitate discussion at Committee level and to raise assurance.

'Focusing On Outcomes'

Members noted a short paper by Kieran Donnelly, Comptroller and Auditor General for NI, which had been circulated for the information of Members. The Chairman drew Members' attention to the 6 Core Principles of Good Governance contained within the paper.

Mr Hatch referred to the comments regarding organisational governance and the role of the Board and suggested the need for the Board to provide strategic guidance to the Corporate Management Team. The Chairman explained that the Board should note professional recommendations coming from the Corporate Management Team and it was for the Team to present proposals to the Board to challenge or support. He further explained that the Board would expect any proposals to be costed, resourced and challenged within the Corporate Management Team prior to presentation to the Board.

Mr Hatch emphasised that frontline services must be a priority for NIFRS and reiterated the need for the Board to provide guidance to Senior Management.

The Interim Chief Executive informed Members that NIFRS' key priority is to meet its statutory legal requirements and explained that the means for delivery/operating model will always need to be considered. He noted that the earlier representative bodies became involved in such considerations the better able NIFRS will be to deliver and meet challenges.

Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool

Members noted an initial draft of the completed Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool which had been circulated for the consideration of Members.

The Chairman gave Members an overview of the exercise undertaken to complete the Assessment and explained how the process would be completed explaining that, in the interest of completeness, he and the Board Administrative Secretary would compile one or 2 Case Studies for subsequent submission to DHSSPS. The Chairman welcomed any final comments from Members with respect to the draft document.

NIFRS Band

The Chairman advised Members that he and the Interim Chief Executive would be arranging a meeting with a representative from the NIFRS Band. Members noted that the Chairman would report back.

Interim Arrangements

Referring to the current interim arrangements with respect to the roles of Chief Executive and Chief Fire Officer, the Chairman informed Members that the Board will be discussing the review of the interim arrangements at the next Board Meeting.

National Joint Council Matters

The Chairman read an extract from the correspondence received by the National Joint Council from the Fire Brigades' Union outlining its misgivings and concerns in relation to changes to the Pension Scheme. He explained that whilst the NJC does not consider Pensions it, however, does consider conditions of service. He stated that the Employers Side still had to respond to same.

Mr J Barbour provided the Meeting with background information and further detail in relation to the concerns raised by the Fire Brigades' Union.

Item 6: Chief Executive's Business – Directors' Updates

Director of Finance & Performance Management

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management presented the Management Accounts for the period 1 April 2012 to 28 February 2013.

She explained that the Accounts were indicating a Revenue overspend of £604k, a significant increase on the January position with a majority of the increase attributable to Estates where £377k of committed maintenance works were identified, these works were not previously on the system. These have now been fully accrued.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that the Corporate Management Team, on 22 February 2013, had discussed the year-end position and, whilst steps were being taken to mitigate the potential overspend, as a result a number of easements have been declared by the Corporate Management Team.

She assured Members that she felt sufficient action had been taken to achieve a year-end breakeven position.

Members noted the current position in relation to work on progressing the 2013/14 Budget.

Referring to the Capital position, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management advised Members that the Accounts were showing an underspend of £238k. She noted that with respect to the Omagh Project, a review of the re-tender process had been completed and Health Estates and the Design Team have recommended that the lowest tender be accepted. She noted that if agreement was given to proceed with the project, NIFRS was hopeful that the project would be completed in-year (2013/14).

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management updated Members on the current position with respect to Business Cases.

In response to a question from Mr D Barbour, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management gave the Meeting an overview of the ongoing engagement between Finance staff and budgetholders.

Mr Kerr thanked the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management for her report and wished her well in her new job. He stressed the importance of budgetholders being aware of their responsibilities in terms of budget management.

During further discussion regarding the preparation of the accounts information presented to the Board, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management highlighted the levels of financial governance applied to the preparation of the Management Accounts and assured Members that the figures have been properly verified.

In response to a question from Mr Hanna, the Interim Chief Executive explained that discussions had taken place with DHSSPS in relation to arrangements to cover the Director of Finance & Performance Management post.

The Interim Chief Executive welcomed the Finance Directorate Report and highlighted that Finance staff and the Corporate Management Team had worked together to control and manage the current position.

Director of Human Resources

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources gave Members an overview of the salient points within the Report.

He referred Members in particular to the Attendance Management Statistics and outlined his concerns in relation to the statistics presented which are predicting an overall average for the year of 11.4 shifts lost/person. He explained that he would be considering the issue in detail, ie, short-term and long-term absence, trends, etc, and would be looking at methods to address the situation. He noted that the increase in long-term absence was significant.

Mr Kerr noted that the issue of long-term absences had been raised at the Finance Committee and stated that he was content that the Director of Human Resources was aware of same.

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 noting that operational performance continues to be measured and monitored on a monthly basis via monthly accountability meetings with the Area Commanders. He also highlighted that NIFRS Operational Assessment Audit process had been validated by the Head of Internal Audit.

Referring to Operational Risk Analysis, the Interim Chief Fire Officer updated Members on a review of the Variable Crewing Shift System which had been requested by the Fire Brigades' Union; the Retained Duty System Review Project and the Operational Risk Management Action Plan. He also updated Members on emergent issues which included a Business Continuity Management Review and the wider CFOA Review of IRMP objects as part of UK Efficiency Review.

Mr Carr referred to recent flooding incidents at Warrenpoint and commended the Interim Chief Fire Officer on the response from the local Station.

The Chairman referred to the recent Retained Recruitment exercise and the comments contained within the Report on the Wholetime Recruitment exercise regarding public references to perceived concerns around nepotism and explained to Members that he sought and received assurances from the Interim Chief Executive and Interim Chief Fire Officer with regard to this issue.

Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate

The Interim Chief Executive presented the Report from the Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate which included an update on Capital Projects and Estates; Procurement; Assembly Questions, etc; and Business Improvement.

Director of Support Services

Members noted the Report from the Director of Support Services. The Interim Chief Fire Officer provided a synopsis of the information presented.

Item 7: Standing Items

Organisational Improvement Committee

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Organisational Improvement Committee Meeting held on 20 February 2013 along with an updated Recommendations Summary.

The Interim Chief Executive reported on the meeting of the Committee which had taken place on 21 March 2013. He explained that the Committee had reviewed the 'red' recommendations and updated Members on progress noting that progress relied on other areas of work.

He reminded Members that in order to build-in assurances, DHSSPS have allocated an Internal Auditor who will verify/challenge any evidence supplied in relation to the closure of recommendations or actions. Members noted that the outcome of these verification exercises were recorded retrospectively.

The Interim Chief Executive stated that he was not content with the pace of implementation of the recommendations and explained that, whilst acknowledging some of the original dates for implementation were overly ambitious, he had raised the matter with the Corporate Management Team to ensure progression of the recommendations.

Referring to a number of recommendations emanating from the NIAO Report, the Interim Chief Executive assured Members that work was ongoing to build these recommendations into the overall change management programme.

The Chairman stressed the need for NIFRS to build on its 'good news' stories and expressed his appreciation to the Corporate Communications Department for all their work. He noted the aspiration to have an intranet facility within the Organisation and an informal newsletter to celebrate NIFRS achievements and human stories.

Item 8: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 9: Sealing of Documents

There were no documents for sealing.

Item 10: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

Desertcreat Project

Mr Hatch referred to the ongoing procurement issues pertaining to the Desertcreat project and suggested the need for someone to raise the issue of the procurement inefficiencies relating to the project.

Tender for Omagh Project

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management referred to the Tender documentation for the Omagh Project and informed Members that agreement on the level of contingency within the Contract remained outstanding.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that NIFRS was challenging the level of contingency proposed and stressed the need to negotiate and agree same.

Following discussion, the Board Members requested that the Contract for the Omagh Project be referred back to the next Board Meeting when the level of contingency for the Contract is clarified and agreed.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.00 PM
