

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

23 APRIL 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
Mrs S Grant
Mr A Hanna
Ald A Hatch
Mr M Kerr
Mr C Mack
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
Mr J Pentland, Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management
Mrs U McCambridge, Corporate Communications Manager
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Ms L Curran, DHSSPS

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Chairman welcomed Mr John Pentland, recently appointed Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management, to the Meeting.

The Chairman expressed his appreciation to the Corporate Management Team and the Members of the Board for all their work. He commented on the significant volume of work which had been shared by the Board and the Corporate Management Team and stated that he felt that the Organisation was now moving forward more positively.

Referring to the Members' Appraisals exercise which was currently underway, the Chairman noted that he would also be acknowledging Members' preparation time for Meetings of the Board and its Committees.

Item 1: Apologies

There were no apologies.

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 March 2013

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

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

Audit & Risk Management Committee – Minutes – 26 March 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee held on 26 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 Hatch, seconded by Mrs Grant.

Mrs Rice, Chairman of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, gave Members an overview of the Business discussed at the Meeting which had included the revised Interim Head of Internal Audit's Assurance Statement; Controls Assurance Updates in respect of both the 2011/12 and 2012/13 Exercises; Draft NIFRS Risk Management Strategy & Policy; and presentation of the 2012/13 External Audit Strategy.

Mrs Rice highlighted in particular that the Committee had received a report on the audit of Human Resource Policy activities within NIFRS and explained that, given the 'limited' Audit opinion, Members have requested an Action Plan be presented to address same.

She also drew Members' attention to the Committee's concerns in relation to the current culture of 'limited' assurance and stressed the need for the Committee to be informed of what action is being taken to resolve same given the Board is ultimately accountable. She explained that the Committee had requested that, in future, the relevant Lead Officers be in attendance at Audit & Risk Management Committee Meetings to ensure accountability, particularly with respect to areas of work with 'limited' assurance. Mrs Rice asked the Board to support her proposal.

Members supported the need for middle and senior Managers to be held accountable.

The Board unanimously approved the Committee's request that the relevant Lead Officers be in attendance at all future Meetings of the Audit & Risk Management Committee.

With respect to the Audit Needs Assessment 2013-16 and Audit Plan 2013-14, Mrs Rice noted that these have been drafted, but have been held pending the review into Internal Audit Services. She stressed the need for the review of Internal Audit Services to be completed as soon as possible.

Finance Committee – Minutes – 9 April 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance Committee held on 9 April 2013, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, subject to a minor amendment, and the recommendations contained therein adopted by the Board, on the motion of Mr Mack, seconded by Mr Hatch.

Mr Kerr, Chairman of the Finance Committee, provided a synopsis of the Business discussed at the Meeting which had included the 2013/14 Budget; Capital Priorities; February Management Accounts; Financial Performance Charts; Overtime and Indicative Sickness Costs; and a Business Case Update.

Referring to the Business Case Update, Mr Kerr informed Members that the Corporate Management Team had agreed that a Project Team be established to develop and review existing guidance and procedures surrounding Business Cases and procurement. The overarching aim of the Project Team will be to develop a policy on Business Cases which will provide clarification to the process of obtaining approval to procure goods and services within NIFRS, whilst still maintaining appropriate control.

He also noted that the Committee had recommended approval of Business Cases for Fireboots and Interim Repairs & Maintenance Service for NIFRS Buildings. He drew Members' attention to concerns raised by Mr Hatch at the Meeting on 9 April regarding the Business Case for Interim Repairs & Maintenance Service. Mr Hatch indicated that he had been assured by the Interim Chief Executive that the maintenance expenditure was being closely monitored.

The Interim Chief Executive reassured Members that the matter in Estates was being closely monitored and stated that he would report back to the Board when he and Finance staff are satisfied that the appropriate assurances and necessary controls are in place with respect to Estates and the maintenance and monitoring of the Measured Term Contract.

Mr Kerr also informed Members that the Committee had considered documentation pertaining to work which was underway with respect to the Desertcreat Project Finance Workstream. He noted that concerns had been raised in relation to NIFRS becoming heavily involved in such workstreams at this stage of the process, noting that there will be other workstreams coming forward. He stated Members were assured that through Corporate Management Team Meetings the Desertcreat project was a priority and that Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford had presented Briefing Papers on resource implications, etc, for workstreams emanating from the Desertcreat project. Mr Kerr further assured Members that as the project progresses any issues/risks will be raised as appropriate with the relevant Committee.

Mrs Rice outlined her concerns in relation to finance for the Project and also in relation to security issues. The Chairman noted that the Desertcreat Project was an Agenda Item later in the Meeting.

In response to a question from Mrs Grant in relation to the Capital budget, the Interim Chief Executive clarified that NIFRS are planning for flat cash Revenue and Capital budget allocations. With respect to Capital easements declared in the previous financial year, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that DHSSPS had indicated that these easements may be returned to NIFRS.

Item 5: Chairman's Business

Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool

The Chairman acknowledged receipt of comments from one Member and welcomed same. He explained that the Working Group will progress the final completion of the Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool for submission to DHSSPS. He added that it was hoped to also include a case study in the months ahead.

Review of Interim Arrangements

This Item was deferred to later in the Meeting.

Official Opening of Down Civic Centre

The Chairman informed Members of an invitation to the Official Opening of Down Civic Centre on 3 May 2013. He asked that should any Member wish to attend they advise the Board Administrative Secretary.

Board Appraisals

The Chairman thanked Members for their completed Appraisals and explained that the Appraisals would now be finalised for signing prior to submission to DHSSPS.

Meeting with Representatives of NIFRS Band

The Chairman informed the Meeting that he and the Interim Chief Executive had met with representatives of the NIFRS Band. The Chairman and the Interim Chief Executive gave an overview of the business discussed explaining that due to governance risk currently associated with the Band it is recommended that the NIFRS Band cease operation.

During discussion, Members acknowledged the significant contribution of the NIFRS Band to NIFRS and its Community Safety initiatives, etc.

Members requested that the Chairman and the Interim Chief Executive have further discussions with Band representatives, including the development of a Memorandum of Understanding between NIFRS and the Band until it ceases operating under the NIFRS brand.

Launch of Enhanced Flood Response Capability – Western Area Command

The Chairman reported positively on his attendance at the official launch on 19 April of NIFRS' enhanced emergency flooding response capability, based in the North West. The format of the launch had been a live emergency flooding rescue demonstration which had taken place on the River Foyle, Londonderry.

He noted that 52 Firefighters from Crescent Link Fire Station in Londonderry, have received the appropriate PPE and extensive training in enhanced flood rescue techniques to help rescue people trapped or likely to become trapped by flood water and to protect them from serious harm.

The Chairman asked that his appreciation be extended to Area Commander Ferguson and his colleagues at Western Area.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer reminded Members that NIFRS now has a statutory responsibility in relation to serious flooding incidents and this new expertise will enhance previous flooding response capability in order to meet the new statutory requirement. He informed Members that the enhanced capability had been 'on the run' from 1 April 2013 and highlighted that the benefits of this capability in the North West had already materialised.

In response to a question from Mr Hatch, the Interim Chief Fire Officer clarified that PSNI have the statutory responsibility for inland water rescue.

The Corporate Communications Manager gave an overview of the media coverage for the launch.

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 12-month period ending 31 March 2013 noting that this was not the final year-end position, as adjustments in period 13 need to be considered as part of the process for the preparation of year-end statutory Accounts. He also noted the change in format of the Finance Report.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed explanation of the analysis of Revenue Income and Expenditure based on the revised Budget at 14 January 2013.

During discussion, Mr Carr expressed his concern that NIFRS budget allocations were not agreed before the beginning of the financial year, as is common practice in Local Government. He highlighted the work involved in the preparation of annual budgets and stressed the necessity to be informed of budget allocations in a timely manner.

The Interim Chief Executive endorsed Mr Carr's comments. He referred to the change in the format of the financial information presented to the Board and the Finance Committee and explained that information was being reviewed and refined to enable the Corporate Management Team and the Board to make more informed decisions.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that NIFRS budget planning was based on an indicative figure advised by DHSSPS. He noted that, as yet, NIFRS budget allocation for 2013/14 had not been confirmed.

Mrs Tally referred to the G8 Summit and sought clarification as to whether there would be any additionality for NIFRS. The Interim Chief Fire Officer acknowledged that NIFRS overtime costs in respect of G8 would be significant and explained that no decision had been reached as to whether funding would be allocated in advance or costs reimbursed.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management referred to Capital expenditure and gave Members an overview of the interim March 2013 position. Members noted the Capital Budget position by Directorate and an analysis of Capital Projects.

Referring to the Briefing Note on Capital Priorities Review 2013/14 to 2020/21, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management drew Members' attention to the significant funding implications of the Omagh and GD92 projects and explained that NIFRS will have to take opportunity cost decisions in respect of capital funding.

Mr J Barbour referred to the budget profile for new Stations noting that there was no allocation of funding in the immediate future and expressed concern that there were still expectations which needed to be managed in this regard, eg, Cushendall, and suggested the need for elected representatives (MLAs and Councillors) to be made aware of the current position.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that the Capital Programme reflects the roll-over year-on-year position. He further explained that NIFRS required major capital investment in Command & Control, ICT and Estates and that this investment was needed in addition to normal Capital requirements. He acknowledged that NIFRS would have difficult decisions to make given the significant pressures on its capital expenditure.

Discussion took place with regard to the current position in relation to Business Cases, specifications, etc, for new build Stations. Members suggested the need for a generic specification for new Stations.

Mr Hatch referred to Item 8 of the Agenda relating to the Omagh Project and reiterated his concerns in relation to the level of contingency within the Contract.

The Officers explained that it remains the position of NIFRS that the level of contingency within the capital budget of the Omagh Fire Station project remains too high and that Health Estates are being overly prudent in their assessment of the risks. Nevertheless Health Estates have listed a number of reasons why they believe that such a contingency remains justified and have strongly advised against any amendment at this stage to the same. The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management advised Members that Health Estates have agreed to work closely with NIFRS throughout the project and specifically with regards to any Variations/Extras where such a contingency could be materially called upon.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management also informed Members that he has entered into dialogue with Health Estates on how such items could be managed. He stated that it has also been agreed that the overall Contingency level can be revisited in the Autumn, consequently NIFRS have agreed to move forward on this basis.

Director of Human Resources

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources gave the Meeting an overview of the information presented with respect to Support staff recruitment, Retained recruitment and Uniformed promotions; Attendance Management update; and the current position in relation to Discipline and Grievance cases reported to Human Resources in March. He noted that the recruitment process for the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs had ended and an appointment had not been made.

In relation to the Attendance Management update, the Director of Human Resources noted that absence has risen from 9.2 shifts/days lost per person in 2011/12 to 11.5 in 2012/13. He highlighted that the percentage of staff never off or off once in a year, has increased from 66% in 2007 to 71% in 2012. Therefore, fewer staff are going off sick but those that do, stay off longer. He stressed the importance of having a focus on the management of long-term absence.

He assured Members that Attendance Management continued to be a priority for the Organisation and outlined work underway to address some of the issues such as the review of the Attendance Management Policy. He gave Members a synopsis of the proposed changes to NIFRS Attendance Management Policy with regard to the management of short-term and long-term absence which is currently in consultation with management and Trade Unions. He stated that he was hopeful the revised Policy would be issued soon. He explained to Members that within the HR structure it was intended to have a dedicated resource within each of the Areas to deal with HR matters, including Attendance Management. He also noted that a Business Case for an Occupational Health Provision had been developed and was currently with DHSSPS.

The Director of Human Resources answered Members' questions regarding various aspects of the information presented.

The Chairman referred to the Health & Safety Workshop which had taken place that morning and, in particular, the discussions in relation to NIFRS' duty of care to staff and the potential need for another Standing Committee to consider health and safety. **Following discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman would discuss the possible establishment of a Health & Well-Being Committee with the Interim Chief Executive.**

The Interim Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the Fire Brigades' Union, as well as the Area Commanders, had expressed concern in relation to the workloads of Officers. He noted that the matter would be discussed at Brigade Negotiating Committee level.

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 in respect of Operational performance, including an explanation of Response Standards for the period January to March 2013, and Operational assurance and audit.

With respect to Operational Risk Analysis, the Interim Chief Fire Officer updated Members on progress with respect to a review of Variable Crewing and noted that the IRMP update had been costed and incorporated into the 2013-2016 Corporate Plan. He also updated Members on progress with regard to the various workstreams pertaining to the G8 Summit. He highlighted the volumes of work involved and explained that non-essential work was being deferred in order to address the demands of G8 and that this will have an impact on some areas within the Annual Business Plan.

Members noted that there were no emergent issues to report.

Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate

Members noted the Report from the Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate. The Interim Chief Executive gave Members an overview of the salient points from the Report including Capital Project and Estates; Procurement; Assembly Questions; and Corporate Communications.

In relation to Procurement and the update on progress with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD) to agree the interim Local Operating Agreement to provide full CoPE coverage for NIFRS, the Interim Chief Executive stated that he was hopeful that the Local Operating Agreement will be finalised this week. Members noted that this Agreement will be in place until March 2014 until the legislative issues are resolved around PaLS.

The Interim Chief Executive noted the significant work which had been achieved with respect to Business Improvement and expressed his appreciation to the Business Improvement Manager. Members noted that NIFRS would be seeking to fill the Business Improvement Manager's post as a priority.

The Chairman referred to the Public Accounts Committee on 24 April 2013 at which the Permanent Secretary, the Interim Chief Executive and former Chief Fire Officer P Craig would be in attendance. He noted the level of work undertaken in preparation for the Hearing and acknowledged the support given to Mr Wallace within NIFRS and DHSSPS. He extended his best wishes for the Hearing.

Director of Safety Services

Members noted the report from the Director of Safety Services. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford provided a synopsis of the key points emanating from his report, including an update on the Directorate's top risks; progress on GD92 and Media Services; and updates on Safety and Occupational Health matters.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that the first draft of the new Prevention & Protection Strategy had been completed and was currently undergoing internal consultation.

Members noted that Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford is scheduling visits to each of the PCSPs to raise awareness of the contribution that NIFRS can make and to demonstrate commitment to the process.

Director of Support Services

The Report from the Director of Support Services was noted.

Item 7: Standing Items

Organisation Improvement Committee

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Organisational Improvement Committee held on 21 March 2013. The Interim Chief Executive highlighted the progress attained with respect to Recommendations Schedule and commended the Committee for all their work.

Desertcreat Project

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford updated Members on developments with respect to the Desertcreat Project. He advised Members that the preferred Bidder had been selected and Ministerial approval to proceed was awaited.

He highlighted in particular the positive work undertaken by the Programme Team and the Design Team on a bill of reductions to get the cost of the College within the OBC scope. He gave Members a brief outline of examples where savings had been achieved and assured Members that these reductions would not impact on the functionality of the College.

Discussion took place with regard to concerns raised in relation to security matters and to the longer-term running costs of the College. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford acknowledged Members' concerns and gave assurance that these issues were being addressed and would continue to be addressed as they arise.

CHANGE IN THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

It was agreed to take Item 5 – Chairman's Business – Review of Interim Arrangements – as the next Item of Business.

Item 5: Chairman's Business Review of Interim Arrangements

At this point, all the Officers left the Meeting at the request of the Chairman in order for the Board to discuss this matter in Closed Session.

At this point,
the Chairman left the Meeting and
the Officers re-joined the Meeting
Mr A Hanna, Vice-Chairman, chaired the remainder of the Meeting

Item 7: Standing Items

WPFG 2013

Members noted a Briefing Note providing an update on WPFG matters.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed the Meeting that the Health Committee had offered to host a Reception in the Long Gallery at Stormont to present their best wishes to WPFG and to give WPFG the opportunity to promote the Games and to raise awareness across the island of Ireland.

Post Meeting Note: *The Health Committee will be hosting a 2013 World Police and Fire Games Awareness Event to be held in the Long Gallery, Parliament Buildings, Belfast on Monday, 13 May 2013 from 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm.*

Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items

Tender – Omagh Project

The Interim Chief Executive noted that this matter had been discussed previously during the Meeting. He reiterated that the Officers were content with the current position and recommended approval of the Contract in order that the project can proceed as soon as possible.

Mr Hatch, whilst restating his concerns in relation to the level of contingency within the Contract, acknowledged the assurances provided by the Corporate Management Team in relation to the cost and monitoring of the Contract.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Hatch, seconded by Mr D Barbour, unanimously -

Resolved: “to approve the award of the Contract for the new Omagh Fire Station to Lowry Brothers Limited at a cost of £3,116,810.00”.

Proposal for Documentary on NIFRS

Members noted a proposal from Imagine TV regarding a documentary on NIFRS.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that, as a result of concerns expressed at Corporate Management Team level, Imagine TV were invited to give a presentation to the Corporate Management Team regarding their proposal. He gave Members a detailed outline of the proposal. He noted that whilst the Corporate Management Team had accepted there were risks associated with the proposed documentary, the positivity of such a documentary had also been recognised.

Following discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mr J Barbour, seconded by Mr Carr, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the proposal for the documentary on NIFRS in principle with the final details to be agreed by the Corporate Management Team”.

The Vice-Chairman requested that Imagine TV be invited to give a presentation to the Board in relation to the proposed documentary.

Economic Appraisals

Members noted the following Economic Appraisals –

Window Cleaning;
Sophtlogic – Provision of Support and Associated Services; and
Back Pay to Wholetime Watch Commanders at Multi-Pump Stations.

Mr J Barbour referred to the back pay for Wholetime Watch Commanders and suggested that it would be prudent for NIFRS to assess the impact of the Part-Time Workers Regulations in respect of Retained personnel at multi-pump Stations.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Economic Appraisals for Window Cleaning; and Sophtlogic for the Provision of Support and Associated Services. The Economic Appraisal for Back Pay to Wholetime Watch Commanders at Multi-Pump Stations was approved in principle – impact of Part-Time Workers Regulations to be assessed”.

Banking Mandates

This Item was deferred to the next Meeting.

Item 9: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 10: Sealing of Documents

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with:

NI Policing Board – Lease for Communications Mast at Comber Fire Station; and
MSM Promotions – Lease of Unit 20, City Business Park, Dunmurry.

Item 11: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

It was also noted that the Trainee Graduation Ceremony was scheduled to take place on 2 May 2013.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 5.10 PM
