

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

28 MAY 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

APOLOGIES: 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 B McClintock, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Support 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

CHANGE IN THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

It was agreed to take Item 8 – Chairman’s Business – Review of Interim Arrangements – as the first Item of Business.

At this point,
all the Officers, with the exception of the
Board Administrative Secretary, left the Meeting

**Item 8: Chairman’s Business
Review of Interim Arrangements**

This Item was discussed in Closed Session.

At this point,
all the Officers re-joined the Meeting

The Chairman explained that the Board, in reviewing the interim arrangements, had considered a number of options going forward. He further explained that the matter would be discussed further at the June Board Meeting and that Members were reminded to present a number of options, with a preferred option, to the Minister.

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 – 23 April 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 April 2013, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, subject to a minor amendment, on the motion of Mr J Barbour, seconded by Mrs Grant.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Item 6: Chief Executive's Business – Directors' Updates ***Director of Human Resources***

The Chairman referred to the discussion at the Health & Safety Workshop in relation to the possible establishment of a Health & Well-Being Committee. He noted the level of work currently being progressed by the Director of HR in respect of the HR function, especially in relation to attendance management. He explained that he and the Interim Chief Executive had felt, given this ongoing work and the proposed re-structure of the HR Directorate, supported by the Human Resources Committee, that there are adequate arrangements in place to support the Board in its duty of care and to address the concerns raised at the Workshop.

The Interim Chief Executive highlighted that the Director of HR's monthly Reports to the Board would address Members' concerns.

Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items
Economic Appraisal – Back Pay to Wholetime Watch Commanders at Multi-Pump Stations

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management referred to the Economical Appraisal in respect of the back pay to Wholetime Watch Commanders for Multi-Pump Stations which had been approved at the Board Meeting on 23 April 2013.

He noted that the Economic Appraisal referred to the legal opinion provided from Belfast City Council in this regard and explained that it was anticipated that this legal opinion would be issued to DHSSPS as supporting documentation.

Members were informed that prior to the Economic Appraisal being submitted to the April Board Meeting, NIFRS had consulted with Belfast City Council to establish if making reference to or the attachment of the advice would have implications from a Data Protection/Freedom of Information perspective.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management stated that a response had subsequently been received from Belfast City Council and as a result the Economic Appraisal had been amended to reflect their comments.

In response to a query from Mr J Barbour, the Interim Chief Fire Officer informed Members that an Area Commander had been appointed to review the matter with respect to Retained Watch Commanders at Multi-Pump Stations.

It was agreed to defer discussion to later in the Meeting. In the meantime to circulate detail of changes requested by Belfast City Council.

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

Joint Negotiating Committee Meeting – 28 May 2013

The Chairman informed Members that the Joint Negotiating Committee had met prior to the Board Meeting. He gave Members an overview of the membership of the Committee and its Terms of Reference.

The Chairman advised Members that, following the Fire Brigades' Union Conference, the Employers' Side of the National Joint Council had been notified that a trade dispute had been registered between the Union and Ministers on the matter of reform of Fire Service Pension Schemes. He noted that the 4 Ministers in each of the regions were currently considering the matter.

The Chairman explained that the Joint Negotiating Committee had met given the potential for industrial action and it was agreed that the Interim Chief Executive and Interim Chief Fire Officer would work closely with the Representative Body and report any significant risk to service delivery to the Board.

Item 5: Chief Executive's Business - Directors' Updates

Director of Finance & Performance Management

Members noted that due to the finalisation of the 2012/13 Financial Accounts and ongoing progress with respect to the 2013/14 budget, no Management Accounts had been presented.

Members noted the Report from the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management. The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members an overview of the information presented particularly in relation to the current position in respect of the 2013/14 Revenue Budget allocation.

Members were informed that DHSSPS have notified NIFRS that the Revenue expenditure allocation for 2013/14 will be £76,494k. The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that this equated to the original opening 2012/13 allocation and also compared to an indicative allocation provided in April 2012 for the current year of £77,346k illustrating a reduction in 12 months of £852k.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that extensive work had been carried out by the Finance Directorate in recent weeks to construct the Actual Budget from first principles and gave Members a detailed overview of the documentation pertaining to the 2013/14 Budget. He highlighted there was a £4,956k shortfall in the Budget and drew Members' attention to a Summary Sheet illustrating the reasons for an increase in expenditure compared to actual spend last year.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management highlighted the impact of Ill-Health Pensions on the Revenue budget. He explained that he was of the view that this expenditure should not be recorded within the Revenue budget and noted that he and the Interim Chief Executive would be raising the issue of accounting for Ill-Health Pensions with DHSSPS. He also drew Members' attention to the significant expenditure associated with Estates spend in terms of heat, light and power, rent & rates, etc, and stated that further analysis will be carried out.

During discussion pertaining to various aspects of the Revenue Budget, the Officers noted Members' comments and answered Members' questions.

Members asked that the Interim Chief Executive and Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management report back to the Board.

Referring to the 2013/14 Capital Budget allocation, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management noted schedules relating to the proposed Capital project spend over the next 8 years. He explained that the Capital position is a fluid area as DHSSPS has indicated that additional funds may arise from within NI Government as well as EU Funds. He stressed the need to have sufficient 'on the shelf' approved projects to exploit any such opportunities that may arise.

Members noted, however, that there is currently a shortfall in the Capital budget if NIFRS is to meet its desired capital spends and this will have to be managed, prioritised and discussed with DHSSPS.

Director of Human Resources

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources summarised the key points –

- it is anticipated that the Director of Finance post will be advertised at the beginning of June;
- Attendance Management – Summary of Concerns and Actions, including a summary of work conducted to analyse ‘stress’ related absence;
- Review of HR Directorate Structure concluded – brief overview of proposed structure noting that full details will be presented to the Human Resources Committee in due course;
- Update on Grievance Cases.

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.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer drew Members’ attention to a note pertaining to NIFRS Emergency Response Standards. He explained that in 2006 NIFRS introduced new Emergency Response Standards to Dwelling Fires and that NIFRS’ Management Information System (MIS) provider had developed an automated query to enable measurement and reporting against this new Standard.

He further explained that as part of further Service Improvement initiatives an Operational Performance Management System was introduced in August 2011 to enable a more comprehensive ‘manual’ analysis of Operational Response.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer informed Members that the Operational Risk Management Department have been working with NIFRS’ MIS provider and the Regional Control Centre (RCC) Systems Management, to develop and integrate a new query to enable full and transparent monitoring of all aspects of Operational Response. This query is now being tested prior to implementation and will provide a breakdown of appliance Response Time to an emergency incident (to include time call is received by RCC; time alert is received at Fire Station; time Crew book mobile; and time an appliance books in arrival at the incident).

Members were informed that stringent acceptance testing of the new query has identified a discrepancy in the information provided in the ‘Time’ column of the tabled output results. This discrepancy has identified that results published for High, Medium and Low response areas relate to the time mobilised at Station/Pager and not the time the call was received at RCC.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer stated that while this reporting error has no direct impact on actual operational performance it did mean that NIFRS are not performing as well as anticipated against the Emergency Response Standards of 2006. He further stated that it was important to note that this historic anomaly was identified as a result of the audit and control assurance process introduced in 2013 and the diligent application of the audit process by the Operations Risk Management Team.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer updated Members on progress with respect to FSEC which will enable risk mapping for different types of emergency incident and the identification of appropriate response times to meet this risk. Members noted that a review of NIFRS Emergency Response Standards is programmed to commence once the base case risk profile is established.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer and Officers answered Members' questions in relation to the information presented.

Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate

Members noted the Report pertaining to the Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate. The Interim Chief Executive gave the Meeting an overview of the salient points emanating from the Report.

The Interim Chief Executive updated Members on the current position with respect to the vacant Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs post explaining that, with DHSSPS approval, NIFRS were seeking to appoint on an interim basis.

Referring to the Public Accounts Committee Hearing, the Interim Chief Executive expressed his appreciation to Corporate Management Team colleagues for all their work and support in respect of preparation for the Hearing. He noted that NIFRS had worked closely with DHSSPS also.

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 arising from his Report, including an update on the GD92 Project; Occupational Health Business Case; and NIFRS Prevention & Protection Strategy.

The Chairman referred to WPFGB and enquired as to whether there were any plans for a fire safety exhibition/presence during the Games. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford referred to discussions with the local Area Commander regarding same and also highlighted there were exhibitions to be held during the WPFGB Conference.

Director of Support Services

Members noted the Report from the Director of Support Services. Assistant Chief Fire Officer McClintock noted the current position with respect to PBI Gold Structural Fire Kit explaining that there was likely to be a one week delay in delivery. He assured Members that NIFRS are continuing to monitor the situation closely.

In response to a question from Mr Mack regarding the potential costs associated with G8, the Interim Chief Fire Officer outlined the current position with respect to funding for G8 and explained that NIFRS would be endeavouring to capture all costs. He stated that the Payment Principles relating to G8 would be circulated to the Corporate Management Team for consideration.

Item 6: Standing Items

Organisational Improvement Committee

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Organisational Improvement Committee held on 18 April 2013. The Interim Chief Executive highlighted the progress attained with respect to the Recommendations Schedule noting that, as at 23 April 2013, 54 recommendations had been 'closed off' with another 11 recommendations almost complete.

Desertcreat Project

Members noted a Briefing Note providing an update on the Desertcreat Project. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that the preferred bidder has been selected and that Ministerial approval to proceed was awaited.

WPFGB 2013

Members noted a Briefing Note providing an update on WPFGB matters. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford reported positively on the awareness event held by the Health Committee at Stormont to promote the Games with Services across Ireland and updated Members on the current position in relation to Registrations.

Item 7: Strategic Standalone Items

Revised NIFRS Code of Procedures on Recruitment & Selection

Members noted a Briefing Note outlining the proposed changes to NIFRS Code of Procedures on Recruitment & Selection. The Director of Human Resources stated that Members' agreement to the proposed changes in principle was being sought and explained that further detail would be presented to the Corporate Management Team and subsequently the Human Resources Committee.

The Director of Human Resources gave Members a detailed overview of the proposed changes. He informed Members that he had met with the Equality Commission to discuss the proposed changes concerning the placing of advertisements in the press, exceptions to external advertisement (ie, advertising internally when restructuring) and tailoring statements. Other changes include the composition of Panels for appointments made by the Board and the use of the Grievance Procedure for internal candidates. Members noted that consultation with the Trade Unions will follow.

During discussion, Mr D Barbour expressed his concern with respect to the proposed change to the current practice for placing advertisements in the press to advertising only in the Belfast Telegraph and the Irish News and local papers as required. He stated that he wished to be disassociated with this proposal.

During further discussion, the Director of Human Resources answered Members' questions relating to various aspects. He also advised Members of the Equality Commission's comments in relation to the proposals.

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

Resolved: “to approve the proposed changes to NIFRS Code of Procedures on Recruitment & Selection in principle subject to amendments”.

NIFRS Procurement Policy

Members noted the revised NIFRS Procurement Policy. The Interim Chief Executive explained that the Policy had been reviewed and updated in accordance with normal practice.

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

Resolved: “to approve NIFRS Procurement Policy”.

Introduction of Primary Authority Scheme for Fire Safety

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members of the Public Authority Scheme which is a sector led scheme being considered by several FRS in conjunction with local business.

He explained that the basis of the Scheme is that a business which has many outlets or factories across the country will affiliate with one Fire & Rescue Service. That Service will set and audit the standard of Fire Safety of that company for all of its premises across the entire country – particularly with reference to the management policies and procedures of the company. He further explained that if NIFRS signed up to the Scheme, there would be the potential that NIFRS would have to accept a Company’s management policy or fire safety standards based on the approval of a FRS from the mainland. Similarly, local companies that have their headquarters in NI but which have factories throughout the UK could potentially want to affiliate to NIFRS thereby giving NIFRS the opportunity to set the FS standards across all their factories.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that at present there is debate as to whether this Scheme is a Statutory or Voluntary Scheme. He noted that CFOA would welcome a voluntarily sector led Scheme led by FRS. He stated that there are benefits in terms of the sector-led Scheme in terms of maintaining professional standards, etc, however, whatever scheme is implemented will have an impact on NIFRS in the future.

Bank Mandates

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management updated Members on the current position explaining that he was currently reviewing the Bank Mandates for NIFRS’ 4 main Bank Accounts and asked that the matter be deferred to the June Meeting.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that NIFRS also had a further 19 Bank Accounts which were Imprest Accounts for Headquarters, FRSTC, Areas and Districts. He outlined the purpose of the Accounts and explained that he was considering the options for streamlining the processes and systems whilst ensuring that good corporate governance is maintained.

He informed Members that an on-line banking service was also established in order for monies to be transferred internally between NIFRS accounts. This facility also allowed payments to be made externally. External payments could only be made with the approval of 2 named individuals within delegated authority limits.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management informed the Meeting that the review of banking controls had highlighted a number of control weaknesses in the current system. He provided Members with a synopsis of the weaknesses identified and the action to address same.

The Chairman requested that the control weaknesses identified within NIFRS' current banking arrangements be flagged up with the Chairman of the Audit & Risk Management Committee and DHSSPS.

Draft Annual Report 2012/13

It was agreed to defer this Item to the June Board Meeting.

Economic Appraisals

Members noted the Executive Summaries pertaining to the following Economic Appraisals:

- Recruitment Advertising (June 2013 to March 2015);
- Commercial and Ancillary Bodywork;
- Replacement Kitchen and Duty Rooms;
- Provision of Stores Consumables;
- Provision of Operational Stock Consumables;
- Service and Maintenance of Fire Extinguishers;
- Service and Maintenance of Building Management Systems;
- Provision of Consultancy Services for NIFRS Replacement Command & Control System; and
- Provision of Portable Buildings.

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

Resolved: “to approve the aforementioned Economic Appraisals”.

At this point,
Mr J Barbour, left the Meeting.

Economical Appraisal - Back Pay to Wholetime Watch Commanders for Multi-Pump Stations

Members noted the summary of changes as requested by Belfast City Council.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs Grant, seconded by Mr Hanna, unanimously:

Resolved: “to approve the revised Economic Appraisal “Back Pay to Wholetime Watch Commanders at Multi-Pump Stations”.

Item 8: Chairman’s Business (including National Joint Council Matters)

Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool

Members noted that NIFRS Board Governance Self-Assessment submission had been forwarded to DHSSPS on 15 May 2013. The Chairman expressed his appreciation to those involved in the exercise for their assistance.

Board Appraisals

The Chairman informed the Meeting that Members’ Appraisals had been received and were ready for submission.

Facing the Future – Findings from the Review of Efficiencies and Operations in Fire and Rescue Authorities in England

Members noted a copy of the Executive Summary and Overview for FRSs.

The Chairman drew Members’ attention to key points within the documentation and also areas of note for future consideration by NIFRS. He explained that he will be asking the Interim Chief Executive to present a NI version of the Report in the future.

Item 9: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 10: Sealing of Documents

There were no documents for sealing.

Item 11: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.00 PM
