

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

24 SEPTEMBER 2013

1.30 PM

PRESENT: Mr A Hanna, Vice-Chairman presiding
Mr C Kerr, Interim Chief Fire Officer
Mr J Barbour
Cllr M Carr
Mrs S Grant
Ald A Hatch
Mr M Kerr
Mr C Mack
Ald Mrs G Rice

APOLOGIES: Dr J McKee
Cllr D Barbour
Mrs P Tally

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wallace, Interim Chief Executive
Mr D Ashford, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Community Protection)
Mr J Allen, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Operational Support)
Mr D Moore, Director of Human Resources
Mrs L Cuddy, Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Mr J Pentland, Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mrs C Murdock, Chief Executive's Department
Ms S Gallagher, DHSSPS
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Vice-Chairman welcomed Ms S Gallagher and Mr J Millar, DHSSPS, to the Meeting.

Item 1: Apologies

Apologies were noted.

Item 2: Declaration of Interests

The Vice-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 – 27 August 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 August 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 Kerr.

At this point,
Mr Hatch joined the Meeting

Arising out of the Minutes:

Finance Report

Mrs Grant sought an update with respect to discussions with DHSSPS in relation to accounting for ill health retirements.

The Meeting noted that the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management would be reporting on this issue under Directors' Reports.

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

Audit & Risk Management Committee Minutes – 12 September 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee held on 12 September 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 Mrs Grant, seconded by Mr J Barbour.

Arising out of the Minutes:

NAO Audit Committee Self-Assessment Checklist 2012/13

Members noted that at the request of DHSSPS, NIFRS Audit & Risk Management Committee is required to complete the NAO Self-Assessment Checklist 2012/13.

Mrs Rice, Chairman of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, informed Members that the Committee, at its Meeting on 12 September 2013, had considered a draft Self-Assessment Checklist in detail. She explained that a revised draft will be circulated to all Board Members and their comments sought. Members were requested to forward any comments to the Board Administrative Secretary by 27 September 2013.

Audit & Risk Management Committee Minutes – 16 September 2013

This Item was deferred to the next Board Meeting.

Remuneration Committee Minutes – 27 August 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 27 August 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 Kerr, seconded by Mrs Grant.

Mr Kerr, a Member of the Remuneration Committee, gave Members a summary of the Business discussed which included a draft Acting-Up/Honoraria Policy and Pay Remits for Wholetime, Retained and Regional Control Centre personnel.

Item 5: Chairman's Business

Members noted that there was nothing to report under Chairman's Business.

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At this point,
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen entered the Meeting

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Item 6: Chief Executive's Business

Director of Operations

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operations. The Interim Chief Fire Officer gave Members an overview of the salient points as follows:

- Standards of Response – noted there were still some concerns with regard to Standards of Response explaining that Emergency Response Standards cannot be met with existing shift systems on some Stations. The Interim Chief Fire Officer acknowledged that this was a longer term issue but highlighted that the risk profiling exercise was well underway and on target for completion in March 2014.
- Operational Risk Management Strategy – informed Members that NIFRS was on target to meet stated objectives.
- Strategic Review of Search & Rescue in NI involving statutory and voluntary agencies – noted that the Area Commander (Eastern Area Command) was representing NIFRS on the review process. Also noted that an impact analysis has already been completed as part of IRMP.
- Firefighter Safety – advised Members of the National FBU concern about Firefighter safety and noted that NIFRS has made a comprehensive submission to DHSSPS. The Interim Chief Fire Officer highlighted that, through joint working with the Fire Brigades' Union, NIFRS had addressed many of the issues with the implementation of the Operations Management Framework, Operations Management & Safety Programme, revised Training Policy, revised Operations Policy and Operational Risk Management Plan.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer drew Members' attention to the key dependencies in respect of the risk management of Firefighter safety such as procurement of the necessary training, interim coping mechanisms for Compartment Fire Fighting Training (CFFT) prior to the move to Desertcreat and the procurement of BA Pods.

Mr J Barbour referred to Health & Safety reports published in the UK and Ireland and the high profile issue of Firefighter safety and stressed the importance of training for Firefighters.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer provided a synopsis of the key achievements including -

- Progress in relation to Operational Risk Management;
- Enhancement of RTC capability;
- Engagement with Community Rescue Service – operational and public safety enhanced;
- Operational Assurance & Accountability Framework fully implemented.

Mr Mack referred to the Strategic Review of Search & Rescue in NI and NIFRS engagement with the Community Rescue Service and sought an overview of NIFRS direction of travel in this regard.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer explained that although NIFRS has a statutory responsibility to rescue, the Department of Justice lead on this matter as PSNI is responsible for the co-ordination of inland water rescue. He gave an overview of NIFRS position in respect of the strategic review and engaging with the Community Rescue Service. He stated that whilst NIFRS has a statutory responsibility for rescue, currently its resources are just adequate and explained that working with Community Rescue Teams enhanced NIFRS' capability.

Mr J Barbour expressed concern in relation to the information presented with respect to failures to respond. He welcomed the recent appointment of Retained Firefighters and commended all those involved in progressing the recruitment exercise. He stressed the need to continue to monitor this issue.

During further discussion in relation to NIFRS rescue capability and responsibilities, the Interim Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions with respect to Maritime rescue and NIFRS engagement with other voluntary search and rescue teams.

In response to a question from Mr Hatch, the Interim Chief Fire Officer updated Members with respect to progress in relation to the procurement of training courses at the Fire Service College and the interim arrangements for CFFT training. He also updated Members on the current position with respect to BA Pods.

Director of Operational Support

The Vice-Chairman welcomed Assistant Chief Fire Officer John Allen, newly appointed Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Operational Support).

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operational Support. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen summarised the key points –

- Research project into the use of fire resistant material from condemned fire tunics to make helmet protective covers for use during “hot fire” training at FRSTC well underway with initial trials of helmet protection covers;
- A capital project to upgrade the provision of specialist operations equipment progressing;
- Issue of kit to recently appointed Retained Trainees well advanced;
- 2 vacant Stores posts, ie, Stores Manager and Stores Officer posts advertised;
- Transport & Engineering Services – highlighted current position with respect to Asset tracking which is ahead of target and also with respect to the procurement of vehicles;
- Operational Training – Members informed that Departmental approval had been received to progress the Single Tender Action for the provision of Specialist Operational Training by the Fire Service College for the remainder of this financial year.

Director of Community Protection

Members noted the report from the Director of Community Protection. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave an overview of his report which included:

- NIFRS have entered into partnership with the “Good Morning Belfast” organisation as part of our People at Risk Strategy; negotiations are ongoing in relation to a regional approach to the “Good Morning” network. This will allow NIFRS access to over 4,000 vulnerable people;
- Launch of Fire Safety week, 7 October 2013, to be hosted by NIFRS in conjunction with ROI Fire Services;
- Potential issue has been identified with fire resistant glazing that may not be fire resistant. NIFRS are working with PSNI to identify customers that have potentially included this as part of a Risk Assessment to enable them to take corrective action where necessary;
- It has been confirmed that a statutory Primary Authority Scheme will be established in the UK for Fire Safety. As previously indicated to the Board the legislation in NI is different, but the presence of national and multi-national organisations in NI will mean this has an effect on how Fire Safety Regulations are enforced in NI;
- Health & Safety – Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford has met with HSE NI to discuss the impact to NIFRS operational personnel of changes to the asbestos licensing laws. NIFRS will seek an exemption from the new regulations, however, there may be implications in terms of health surveillance;
- GD92 – Tender for Lot 1 has been awarded and work is underway in line with the Project Plan; a decision has been taken not to award Lot 2 but to undertake further research and seek a more future-proof solution;

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford noted that the launch of the Fireworks Safety Campaign would be held on 2 October and Road Safety Week would be held week commencing 18 November 2013. He also informed Members that approval had been given for the NISLEC Safety Centre project to proceed.

In response to questions from Members, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford provided further clarification regarding the current position with respect to the Media Services Contract and the decision not to award Lot 2 of the GD92 Contract.

During further discussion in relation to NIFRS media plan, Members requested that NIFRS 5-year Media Services Plan be presented to Members for information, along with approximate costs.

Director of Finance & Performance Management

The report from the Director of Finance & Performance Management was noted. The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management stated he would address 2 main themes with the Board – the Management and Capital Accounts for the 5 months ended 31 August 2013; and the ongoing discussions with DHSSPS to achieve a balanced Revenue Budget for 2013-14.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management referred to the Revenue Financial Performance for the 5 months ended 31 August 2013. He explained that the Annual Financial budget is based on the latest anticipated budget requirement of £79.522m and gave a detailed overview of the analysis of financial performance by expenditure type which shows an underspend of £392k (compared with £93k reported at 31 July 2013). He assured Members that Management Accounts continues to monitor and adjust the profiling of budgets in line with anticipated timing of expenditure, and in agreement with budget holders.

Referring to the Capital Financial Performance for the 5 months ended 31 August 2013, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management summarised the current position noting that the Management Accounts are indicating an underspend of £303k. He explained that £187k of the underspend related to the Omagh project for which expenditure remains behind profile.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that NIFRS' bid for an additional £827k capital funding in the October monitoring round had been successful. He advised Members of the key drivers for the funding which included a bid from Technical Directorate to divert budget cover for All Terrain Vehicles to the purchase of 9 WRLs and to increase the number of Modular BA PODs from 3 to 6 and an easement for the Community Protection Directorate relating to slippage on the GD92 project. He advised Members that informal communications with DHSSPS suggest that the additional funding should be available in year; but drawing the additional funds this year will most likely result in a corresponding reduction in budget cover next year.

Mr J Barbour expressed concern regarding the level of overtime costs particularly in the Regional Control Centre due to establishment issues. He stressed the need to address these issues. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen explained that a review of Regional Control Centre was currently being conducted.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management then discussed the current 2013-14 Revenue Budget and circulated potential options to meet the 2013/14 budget shortfall for the information of Members. He provided a summary of the options and explained that following representations to DHSSPS that these options would have serious impact on NIFRS service delivery, and eventually DHSSPS had increased NIFRS budget by a further £1m. This leaves remaining savings of £1,086k to be sourced from among the budgetary headings listed within the potential options. Members noted that ill-health retirements would no longer be accounted for under NIFRS revenue budget going forward and this was a major achievement in itself.

During a full and frank discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions regarding the information presented particularly with respect to any potential adverse impact on NIFRS service delivery and NIFRS undertaking its statutory duties. In relation to the impact on media services and training, the Officers reminded the Board that NIFRS had a statutory duty to educate and to ensure its personnel were adequately trained and equipped to perform their duties.

Mr J Barbour expressed his concern regarding the budget position and suggested the need for the Board to meet with the Minister and to highlight the potential implications of the budget shortfall on NIFRS ability to fulfil its statutory duties. The Vice-Chairman requested that NIFRS first be given time to see if further savings could be achieved without affecting service delivery and/or safety critical matters.

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At this point,
Mrs Rice left the Meeting

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Following further discussion, it was agreed that the potential options to meet the 2013/14 budget shortfall would be discussed further at the next Meeting.

Members requested they be kept informed if any potential savings were to adversely affect NIFRS service delivery and/or safety critical matters, along with a breakdown identifying statutory and non-statutory costs as appropriate.

The Interim Chief Executive stated that NIFRS Finance Directorate had now turned its attention to the 2014-15 Budget and as DHSSPS had stated the extra £1m is for the current year only then this process would also be very challenging over the coming months.

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THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 3.35 PM
AND RECONVENED AT 3.45 PM

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The Vice-Chairman acknowledged that today's Board Meeting was the last Board Meeting for Paula Tally and Arnold Hatch as their term of office was coming to an end. On behalf of the Board, he expressed his appreciation for all their work and dedication to this Board, and to previous Boards, and extended best wishes for the future.

Mr Hatch thanked the Chairman and Vice-Chairman for their support and leadership. He expressed his appreciation to his Board colleagues and the Corporate Management Team.

Change in the Order of Business

Members agreed to take Item 7: Standing Items – Desertcreat Project and Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items – Draft NIFRS Prevention & Protection Strategy 2014-19 as the next Items of Business.

Item 7: Standing Items

Desertcreat Project

Members noted a Briefing Note providing an update on the Desertcreat Project. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford advised Members that there has been no further progress, the preferred bidder has been selected and the programme is still awaiting the Minister's approval to proceed.

Members noted that when the decision has been made in respect of the Business Case addendum, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford will deliver a detailed presentation to the Board outlining the position going forward.

Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items

Draft NIFRS Prevention & Protection Strategy 2014-2019

Members noted the draft NIFRS Prevention & Protection Strategy 2014-2019. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that the Strategy sets out how NIFRS will protect the public and business community in Northern Ireland from the dangers of fire and other emergencies. He gave the Meeting a synopsis of the 10 key areas of focus within the Strategy.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford answered Members' questions relating to various aspects of the Strategy.

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

Resolved: “to approve the draft NIFRS Prevention & Protection Strategy 2014-2019”.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford agreed to report back to the Board on the outcomes following the Consultation Exercise.

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

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Item 6: Chief Executive's Business

Director of HR

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

- Recruitment & Selection Update – Director of Finance appointed and will commence employment on 1 November 2013; Stores Manager and Stores Officer posts advertised;
- Review of HR Directorate – 7 posts identified for recruitment; Job Descriptions and Selection Implementation Plans currently being developed;
- Retained Recruitment – 87 conditional offers of employment issued;
- Attendance Management update;
- Discipline and Grievance update;
- Highlighted progress with respect to HR Policy development.

In response to a question from the Vice-Chairman, the Director of Human Resources provided clarification with respect to the proposed structure within the HR Directorate and the 7 posts identified for recruitment. He also answered Members' questions in relation to the revised Attendance Policy for the management of absence.

Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs

Members noted the Report from the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs. The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs gave a brief overview of the information presented which included:

- Review of the structure within the Planning & Corporate Affairs Directorate underway;
- Planning/KPIs – NIFRS Annual Business Plan Progress Report for first quarter completed, together with DHSSPS Organisational Planning update for 2013/14; discussions underway regarding the business planning process for 2014/15; work continuing with each functional Department to develop Local Performance Indicators linked to annual business task outputs for 2013/14;
- Estates – referred to an Estates Update Report presented to the Audit & Risk Management Committee and explained the need to conduct an Estates survey also highlighting that the investment identified in the VB Evans Survey Report of 2008 had not been delivered resulting in continued deterioration of NIFRS estate;
- Procurement progressing with safety critical issues being prioritised.

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At this point, Ms S Gallagher and
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS, left the Meeting.

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Item 7: Standing Items

Organisational Improvement Committee

Members noted that the next meeting of the Committee is planned for early October – date to be confirmed.

The Interim Chief Executive referred to the Public Accounts Committee Report and noted that, as yet, there was no date for the publication of the Report.

Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items

Pension Issues

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members an overview of a claim from a former employee relating to the payment of a deferred pension. Members noted that the deferred pension would not come into payment until the member has attained the age of 60.

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

Resolved: “on the basis of the facts in this case, to approve the award of a deferred pension from age 60 based on what information NIFRS have available regarding length of service and pay received for his rank at that time”.

Reinstatement of Widow’s Pension

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management outlined the background to a request received in respect of the reinstatement of a widow’s pension. He explained that the Board was being asked to make a determination on whether to exercise its discretion in respect of reinstating a former widow’s pension entitlement.

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

Resolved: “on the basis of the facts in this case, to approve the reinstatement of the Widow’s Pension with effect from 16 August 2013.”

Item 9: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 10: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Peugeot c/o Curtis Cars, Ballymena – Small and Medium Vans;
Fiat Group Automobiles UK Limited – Crew Cab Vans;

Renault UK Limited – Civilian Specification Flexi Duty Officer Cars;
Renault UK Limited – Medium Estates Van and Large Mechanics Van;
Hunter Apparel Solutions Limited – Firefighter Structural Fire Helmets and Associated Parts;
Arqiva Limited – Lot 1 Replacement GD92 Communications & Mobilising System;
Browns Coachworks Limited – BA Training Pods (Up to 6); and
Jewers Door Limited – Replacement of Appliance Room Doors at Various Locations.

Item 11: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

Members also noted that the Long Service & Good Conduct Medal Ceremony would be held on 28 September 2013.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.25 PM
