

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

27 AUGUST 2013

1.30 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Mr J Barbour
Cllr D Barbour
Mrs S Grant
Ald Mrs G Rice

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
Mrs L Cuddy, Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Mr J Pentland, Interim Director of Finance & Performance
Management
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Ms D Mullan, 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 – 30 July 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 July 2013, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Carr, seconded by Mr Mack.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Review of Audit & Risk Management Committee

The Chairman referred to the discussion and decision taken at the last Board Meeting that a comprehensive review of all Board Committee structures and functions be undertaken. He noted the desire of the Corporate Management Team to inter-link with the Board and its Committees to progress outcomes, etc, and to ensure robust governance arrangements appropriate to the Organisation.

The Chairman suggested that it may be useful for NIFRS to consider the structure within other Public Bodies such as the NI Assembly and the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service.

In response to a question from the Chairman regarding the way forward over the next few months, the Interim Chief Executive explained that the Corporate Management Team would consider the matter initially and bring back its thoughts and ideas to a future Board Meeting. He further explained that the review of the Board's Committee structure and functions presented an opportunity for the Corporate Management Team to reassess its direction of travel in relation to Directorate realignments ensuring corporate governance provides stronger accountability and transparency.

The Interim Chief Executive noted that consideration would also be given to the frequency of Meetings and stated that he would welcome discussion, for example, regarding the possibility of the Board convening bi-monthly meetings. He outlined a suggested way forward, eg, a Board Meeting in the morning with focused sessions in the afternoon such as planning and budget matters. The Interim Chief Executive stated that he hoped the revised Committees structure will enable the Board to take a more strategic view of the Organisation's business activity.

Fire & Rescue Advisor for NI

Mr Kerr referred to the arrangement with the Scottish Government whereby DHSSPS are able to avail of Mr Torrie's services as a Fire & Rescue Advisor for NI and sought clarification as to the availability of advice for NIFRS.

At this point,
Mr Hatch joined the Meeting

The Interim Chief Executive explained that whilst Mr Torrie will have a contracted relationship with DHSSPS, he certainly envisaged NIFRS also being able to seek advice from Mr Torrie.

Desertcreat Project

Mr Kerr sought an update on the current position with respect to the Desertcreat Project. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford advised Members that the position remained unchanged in that the preferred bidder has been selected and the programme is awaiting Ministerial approval to proceed.

2013 World Police & Fire Games

Mr Kerr congratulated Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford and the WPFG team for an excellent Games and commended everyone involved.

The Chairman supported Mr Kerr's comments and also reported positively on the Games.

Audit & Risk Management Committee Minutes – 1 July 2013

Referring to the Local Operating Agreement pertaining to CoPE arrangements with NIFRS, Mr Hatch enquired if a copy of the Agreement would be circulated to Members for information.

The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs stated that the Agreement had now been signed by CPD and copies would be circulated.

The Interim Chief Executive reminded Members that the LOA was an interim arrangement and explained the need to be mindful of the cost implications.

Directors' Updates *Director of Operational Support*

Assistant Chief Fire Officer McClintock informed the Meeting that PBI Gold had been received and distributed ensuring all personnel have the first issue of kit. He noted that all the kit would be distributed by October 2013.

Director of Safety Services

Referring to the GD92 Project, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that the Contract for Lot 1 had been awarded. Members noted that a meeting to discuss Lot 2 was scheduled this week.

The Chairman welcomed the progress attained.

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

Finance Committee Minutes – 30 July 2013

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance Committee held on 30 July 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 Mr Carr.

Finance Committee Minutes – 19 August 2013

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee held on 19 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 Hatch, seconded by Mr Kerr.

Remuneration Committee Meeting – 27 August 2013

Members noted that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee had been held that morning.

The Chairman gave Members a synopsis of the Business discussed in particular a draft Acting-Up/Honoraria Policy and Pay Remits for Wholetime, Retained and Regional Control Centre personnel.

Item 5: Chief Executive's Business

Finance Report

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed overview of the Finance Report.

With respect to the Revenue financial performance for the 4 months ended 31 July 2013 Compared to Budget, the Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that year to date variance when comparing actual expenditure with budget shows an underspend of £93k. He assured Members that Management Accounts will continue to monitor and adjust the profiling of budgets in line with anticipated timing of expenditure, until the outcome of discussions with DHSSPS regarding the budget shortfall.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management referred to NIFRS revenue allocation and continuing discussions with DHSSPS regarding a resolution to the revenue shortfall and updated Members on these discussions relating to the accounting of Ill-Health Pensions. He stated that he was hopeful a resolution was imminent, however, should an agreement not be reached, significant adjustments to the budget would be necessary.

Mr Kerr commended all for their work in achieving efficiencies. He referred to the significant revenue shortfall to be addressed should a resolution not be reached with DHSSPS and sought clarification of the potential impact on frontline services.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer assured Members that the Corporate Management Team had analysed the potential impact of the shortfall in relation to operational service delivery and had discussed potential areas for efficiencies. He noted that there were areas within IRMP which will require consideration and highlighted the good progress which had been achieved to date.

Mrs Tally noted the Review of NIFRS Fire Station Costs report and expressed concern that areas would be targeted due to less cost. She stressed the need to ensure no area of Northern Ireland was left compromised.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer pointed out the need to ensure a proper sequence to achieve an efficient and effective service delivery - Emergency Response Standards need to be reviewed and agreed by the Corporate Management Team initially and then presented to the Board for wider debate; risk profiles need to be completed; other considerations such as a review of the provision of specialist rescue services will be carried out.

The Interim Chief Executive noted the 3 Reports being considered at today's Meeting and explained that these were a starting point but until we have gathered all of the base data we are not in a position to make key decisions. He stated that the Board needed to have an awareness of expenditure areas as by next April the Board will have had to have made informed decisions relating to budget efficiencies.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management provided a detailed overview of the Management Accounts for the 4 month period ended 31 July 2013 and also the Capital financial performance for the same period.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer McClintock informed Members of the current position with respect to All Terrain Vehicles explaining that the project was not proceeding in the current year. However the funding had been reallocated to the purchase of WRLs in the current year.

Referring to Budget Risks, Mrs Tally expressed concern regarding the issue of Business Cases and the timeframes for progressing same as it manifests in delays and underspends.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management highlighted the significant level of Business Cases which had been progressed in the last 3 months.

Review of NIFRS Fire Station Costs

Members noted a report on the Review of NIFRS Fire Station Costs. The Director of Finance & Performance Management gave an outline of the information presented.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that the Finance Directorate have undertaken extensive work in determining the full cost of operational Fire Stations based on absorbing the full cost of NIFRS and the analysis had been undertaken to provide pointers for any future analysis associated with the efficiency agenda within the Service. He gave Members a detailed explanation of the basis of allocation of expenditure to operational Stations including allocation of District, Area, FRSTC and Headquarters expenditure.

During discussion in relation to the information presented, Mr Carr suggested the need to calculate an actual cost per call and expressed concern with respect to how the costs could be perceived.

In response to a query from Mr Kerr regarding the level of false alarm calls and reduction of same, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford updated Members on the current position with respect to the review of NIFRS Unwanted Fire Calls Policy and work currently ongoing to reduce Unwanted Fire Calls.

Facing the Future – Sir Ken Knight

Members noted a report providing an analysis of where NIFRS sits in relation to the findings in Sir Ken Knight's report.

The Chairman outlined the background to the Report explaining that he had felt it would be beneficial for the Board to consider how NIFRS compares with its English colleagues and to provide some comparison for the Board to be aware of as it considers efficiency proposals.

The Director of Finance & Performance Management explained how the comparison exercise had been conducted and provided an overview of the conclusions within the Report. He stated that it had been a useful exercise as it provided the Corporate Management Team and the Board with "pointers" to where it could look for efficiencies by analysing how NIFRS compared to its English colleagues.

During discussion regarding the information presented, the Officers answered a number of wide-ranging Members' questions.

The Interim Chief Executive commented that the Report should not be used as a direct comparison and indeed the best comparator for NIFRS in future years is likely to be the Scottish model. He stated however that it was a useful starting point to inform the debate when considering which areas might warrant a focus for future change and efficiencies across NIFRS.

The Interim Chief Executive commented that delivering efficiencies is a fundamental issue for NIFRS and the Board and pointed out the need for NIFRS to challenge everything it does. He stated that NIFRS can and will take into account the Report's findings and other outcomes and start to build a model, fit for purpose.

Item 6: Chairman's Business

The Chairman informed the Meeting that he intends to step aside as Board Chair at the end of the year. He commented that the past 3 years had seen NIFRS under a great deal of public scrutiny, and also him personally, and he believed that the end of this year will mark the conclusion of a very challenging period but would also create a timely opportunity for a new team to lead the Service into the future.

He paid tribute to all members of NIFRS both frontline staff and the many other administrative and specialist colleagues who support them in the background.

The Chairman expressed his appreciation to Board Members for all their help and support. He noted that on top of the recent high levels of political scrutiny and Departmental compliance, NIFRS has continued to provide the general public with a consistently high service, not only in terms of responding to emergencies but also in the wider context of community safety and fire prevention.

Members thanked the Chairman for his leadership particularly through a difficult and challenging period for NIFRS and extended best wishes for the future.

The Chairman, again, thanked the Members for their support and stressed the need for the Board to now build for the future.

Item 7: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 3.45 PM
