

# NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

## MINUTES OF A MEETING

22 OCTOBER 2013

1.40 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Mr J Barbour

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  
Mrs U McCambridge, Corporate Communications Manager  
Miss A Maguire, Personal Secretary  
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Chairman welcomed Mr J Millar, DHSSPS, to the Meeting.

### **Item 1: Apologies**

Apologies were noted. The Chairman informed Members that Mr J Barbour was currently working on UK-wide issues in relation to Firefighters' pensions.

### **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 – 24 September 2013**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 September 2013, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mr Mack.

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

##### **Audit & Risk Management Committee Minutes – 16 September 2013**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee held on 16 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 Mr D Barbour, seconded by Mrs S Grant.

Mrs Rice, Chairman of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, gave Members a summary of the Business discussed which included Review of Internal Audit Unit – still awaiting outcome of review; Procurement & Insurance Internal Audit Report; Estates Update Report; Priority 1 Recommendations; NAO Audit Committee Self-Assessment; and NIFRS – 2012/13 Report to Those Charged with Governance.

Mrs Rice outlined that the Committee had expressed concerns at the lack of progress with respect to Priority 1 Recommendations and had requested for Lead Officers to be in attendance at the next Meeting to provide Members with an update. She stated that it was the responsibility of the Audit & Risk Management Committee to ensure Recommendations were being implemented.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that Priority 1 Recommendations are prioritised by the Corporate Management Team and delegated to Lead Officers. He emphasised that the first line of scrutiny and accountability lies with the Corporate Management Team and the Board and highlighted it would not be feasible for individual Lead Officers to be made accountable at the Audit & Risk Management Committee. Mrs Rice stated that a decision needs to be made at the next Audit & Risk Management Committee Meeting in relation to ensuring Priority 1 Recommendations are implemented speedily.

The Chairman stated that Corporate Management Team and Board functions would be discussed later in the Meeting.

In relation to the Report to Those Charged with Governance, the Chairman highlighted this was covered fully in the PAC Report and those proposals would be discussed later in the Meeting.

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. As agreed at the Board Meeting on 24 September 2013, a copy of the draft Self-Assessment Checklist was circulated to Members for consideration and comment.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Hanna, seconded by Mr Mack, unanimously –

**Resolved: “to approve the NAO Audit Committee Self-Assessment Checklist 2012/13”.**

## **Finance Committee Minutes – 8 October 2013**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance Committee held on 8 October 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 Carr, seconded by Mrs Grant.

Mr Kerr, Chairman of the Finance Committee, gave Members a summary of the Business discussed which included Contract for WRLs; latest position on 2013-14 Revenue Budget; Internal Financial Performance Charts & Trends; Overtime Costs; and Indicative Sickness Costs.

In relation to overtime costs, the Chairman informed Members that work was ongoing between the Interim Chief Fire Officer and Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management.

In relation to the Contract for WRLs, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that the supplier to whom the Contract had been awarded had gone into insolvency. Members noted that an order for 6 BA Pods had already been placed, but no orders had been placed as yet for WRLs. The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs updated Members on the current position and informed Members that legal advice was awaited.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management confirmed there were no financial implications as the order for WRLs had not been placed and no money had been paid as yet for the order for BA Pods.

## **Human Resources Committee Minutes – 8 October 2013**

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held on 8 October 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 Mack, seconded by Mrs Grant.

Mr Hanna, Chairman of the Human Resources Committee, gave Members a summary of the Business discussed which included:

- A report on Retained Recruitment by Area Commander Denvir – 87 conditional offers made (72 to external candidates and 15 to Wholetime personnel) – it was noted that 5 conditional offers had been withdrawn and there were outstanding vacancies at 3 Stations;
- Review of HR Directorate – 7 posts identified for recruitment, Job Descriptions and Selection Implementation Plans currently being developed;

- Policy Development – the following Policies were approved: NIFRS Code of Procedures on Recruitment & Selection; The Recruitment of Ex-Offenders and the Security of Disclosures Policy & Procedure; Employment of Migrant Workers Policy & Procedure; NIFRS Attendance Policy; NIFRS Acting-Up/Honoraria Policy; NIFRS Grievance Policy & Procedure; NIFRS Dignity at Work Policy & Procedure; NIFRS Good & Harmonious Working Policy and Joint Declaration of Protection; Starting Salaries for Internal and External Appointments of NIFRS Support Staff;
- G8 Payment Principles; and
- DHSSPS & BSO Reports – Combined Recommendations Schedule Update.

The Chairman welcomed the number of HR Policies implemented.

In relation to the Equality & Diversity Forum held on 1 October 2013, Mrs Rice, Chairman of the Forum, outlined that general training for junior officers had been raised. She queried how Officers were expected to carry out their duties efficiently if they were not being trained properly. Mr Hanna informed Members that he had discussed general training with Mrs Rice, and the matter would be raised at the next Meeting of the HR Committee.

Officers answered Members' queries in relation to Management development programmes and induction training for newly promoted officers.

#### **Item 5: Chairman's Business National Joint Council Matters**

The Chairman updated Members on National Joint Council matters including work in progress with respect to Firefighters working beyond the age of 55-60; national criteria for fitness; and the Fire Service Reform.

#### **Sir Ken Knight Report**

The Chairman informed Members that he had met with Sir Ken Knight in relation to his report and collaboration with other emergency services. He outlined that he had also met with the Vice-Chairman of Merseyside FRS.

#### **PAC Report**

Discussion deferred to the end of the Meeting.

#### **Item 6: Chief Executive's Business Directors' Updates**

#### **Change in the Order of Business**

It was agreed to take the Director of Finance & Performance Management Report as the next item of business.

## **Director of Finance & Performance Management**

The Report from the Director of Finance & Performance Management was noted. The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management gave Members a detailed overview of his report.

In relation to the 2013/14 Revenue Budget Allocation, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management explained that further meetings with Budget Holders have taken place and Procurement Issues and Spends to Date have been analysed with the result that the Budget has been balanced. He stated that the efficiencies achieved will not critically impact on service delivery for the remainder of the year. Members noted monthly meetings will be held with Budget Holders and Area Managers in relation to their budgets.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management commended his staff for all their work in respect of the budget. Members concurred with his comments.

The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that the Finance Directorate had commenced the budgetary process for 2014/15, with negotiations for the budget to be finalised by January 2014.

During discussion, Officers answered Members' queries in relation to the efficiencies, including reduction of agency holiday pay, and publicity campaigns.

In relation to publicity campaigns, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford explained that the publicity budget had been spent and there would be no further campaigns this financial year. Members expressed concern as they believed these campaigns were having an impact on the public and were helping to save lives. The Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management noted that £300k would be available next financial year for publicity campaigns.

Mrs Rice suggested a joint advertising approach with the Policing & Community Safety Partnerships (PCSPs) and also highlighted availability of grant aid. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford stated that consideration had been given to joint advertising with the PCSPs.

In relation to the 2013/14 Capital Budget Allocation, the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management informed Members that DHSSPS have been advised of the position with regard to the contract for WRLs and BA Pods and the potential for rolling forward some of the capital spend to 2014/15.

The Chairman thanked the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management for his report. He noted that this would be the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management's last Meeting and expressed his appreciation for all his work to date and wished him well for the future.

## **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:

- Operational Assurance and Audit – the Operations Performance Inspectorate has commenced a programme of District Audits to quality assure and validate the Area Audit process forming part of the Operations Management Framework. The Interim Chief Fire Officer outlined that a substantial level of assurance would be reported at the December Board Meeting. 14 audits have been programmed in with a completion date of 28 February 2014.
- Operational Issues of Note – Standards of Response for September 2013 – Members noted the medium risk for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> appliances due to Retained availability.

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

- Draft Operational Risk Management Plan 2014/15 developed and ready for consultation;
- FSEC Risk Profiling Review methodology agreed and implemented;
- Review of Operational Audit process completed; and
- Active Operational Monitoring Policy developed – implementation date envisaged as 1 December 2013.

In relation to Summary of NIFRS Operational Performance – September 2013 – Figure 4 – Wholetime Mobilisation greater than 90 seconds 2012/13 and 2013/14, the Chairman welcomed a reduction of 37% on the previous month. He highlighted, however, that the report's emphasis was mainly on monitoring Retained performance and he would welcome more information on the monitoring of Wholetime performance.

### **Director of Operational Support**

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

- Work is well underway to ensure NIFRS compliance with a Coroner's Rule 43 letter to Hampshire FRS following the deaths of 2 Firefighters in a Hi-rise fire.
- Work is continuing on a number of smaller projects which have been identified through the IRMP process and other arenas including a local initiative in response to a recently developed downhill mountain bike track where, in the first 12 weeks of operation, NIFRS assisted with the rescue of 8 persons suffering a range of serious fractures including spinal, neck and legs. There is no vehicular access and NIFRS staff had to carry the injured persons some distance over steep and rough ground to get to an ambulance. The Mule, which is a type of single-axled buggy used by most mountain rescue teams accompanied by a Slix stretcher, represents a very effective means by which NIFRS are providing a pilot response to this new and emergent risk to the public. The Chairman welcomed this joint working initiative.
- Stores Manager interviews are scheduled for 14/15 November 2013 and Stores Officer shortlisting is scheduled for 23/24 October 2013.
- PBI Gold – 2<sup>nd</sup> set of kit to be rolled out by December 2013.

- Transport & Engineering Services – an increase of 97.78% in September in respect of services and inspections on time. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen answered Member's queries in relation to how services and inspections are benchmarked against other FRSs and other public services.
- Regional Control Centre (RCC) – 2 commendations from the Interim Chief Fire Officer to Blue Watch, RCC, for management of the slurry incident where 3 persons lost their lives; and Green Watch, RCC, for management of a persons reported incident where Emergency Call Handling techniques were used.
- Operational Training – on schedule. Procurement for Fire Service College training is progressing.
- 4 vacancies in FRSTC to be progressed through the Temporary Promotions Agreement to bring FRSTC to full complement.

Following queries from Members in relation to Asset Tracking, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen outlined there was currently a 94% compliance rate with the database. Following a query from the Chairman in relation to asset tagging items such as photocopiers, PCs, projectors, etc, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen highlighted that the system is designed for operational equipment/appliances only.

The Chairman expressed concern that items such as PCs, photocopiers, projectors, etc, are at risk and suggested the need for an asset register for those non-operational items of equipment. The Interim Chief Fire Officer explained Asset Registers are in place at Area Commands to record local assets.

### **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 Fire Safety Week – 7-13 October – focus on 11 October was on Home Fire Safety Checks and working in partnership with others to protect the vulnerable following the death of a vulnerable older man in an accidental fire in Western Area Command on 9 October.

Members noted updates in respect of Health, Safety & Operations; GD92; ICT; Occupational Health – DHSSPS are consulting with CPD regarding an issue relating to procurement for an Occupational Health Scheme, this position is unchanged since the last Board Meeting; and 2013 WPFPG – won a UTV/Business Eye award, jointly with the UK City of Culture, for the best Northern Ireland tourist/hospitality project of the year.

### **Director of HR**

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources gave Members a synopsis of the key points including:

- Recruitment & Selection Update – Director of Finance, Mrs Josephine Kelly, would commence employment on 1 November 2013; Stores Manager interviews scheduled and Stores Officer shortlisting scheduled; Equipment Workshop Supervisor and Technical Support Officer posts to be advertised week commencing 28 October 2013.

- Review of HR Directorate – 7 posts identified for recruitment; Job Descriptions and Selection Implementation Plans currently being developed. Director of Human Resources to meet with NIPSA on 25 October to enable the advert to progress.
- Retained Recruitment – process is nearing completion.

Members noted updates with respect to Attendance Management, Discipline and Grievance, and HR Policy development.

The Director of Human Resources answered Members' queries in relation to the number of discipline cases and the outcomes, and NIFRS process for dealing with potential fraud cases.

In relation to outstanding grievances, the Chairman highlighted that the PAC Report states there were 22 outstanding grievances, and stated this should be challenged as it does not correlate with the figure reported to the Board. He also expressed concern at the number of grievances at Station level. The Director of Human Resources noted that from April 2013 there have been 10 grievance cases which was reasonable.

The Director of Human Resources answered Members' queries in relation to management of relationship issues between Retained and Wholetime personnel on shared Stations.

### **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:

- Capital Projects - New Omagh Fire Station works are on schedule.
- Procurement - backlog of contracts progressing. Local Operating Agreement expires at the end of March 2014 - approval is awaited for BSO to take over from the Local Operating Agreement from 1 April 2014.
- Planning/KPIs – a Performance Team has been set up to review performance management within NIFRS and it was noted the Team would progress the Recommendations Database as well as the business planning process.

The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs explained that with respect to the Contract for WRLs, the Evaluation Panel may need to be reconvened to re-evaluate the Tenders. She stated an urgent Finance Committee Meeting would then need to be convened to approve the decision of the Evaluation Panel.

Mrs Rice highlighted that Estates Management had been a topic raised at the Audit & Risk Management Committee, and was pleased to note that work which had been outstanding for some time was now progressing

Members expressed concern regarding the potential impact of Board/Committee business following Mr Hatch and Mrs Tally's end of tenure. The Chairman outlined that the appointment of 2 new Members and a Chairman was being progressed by DHSSPS and the Northern Ireland Public Appointments Unit.

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At this point,  
the Interim Director of Finance & Performance Management  
and Mr J Millar, DHSSPS, left the Meeting  
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## **Item 7: Standing Items**

### **Organisational Improvement Committee**

The Interim Chief Executive gave an update on progress from the Organisational Improvement Committee Meeting held on 16 October 2013. He outlined that 112 recommendations had now been closed and also highlighted a number of HR policies had now been implemented which have closed down a number of the recommendations. He stated a number of recommendations should be closed off by March 2014.

The Interim Chief Executive noted the timeframe for addressing the recommendations relating to Wholetime Recruitment would be longer as no Wholetime Recruitment exercise had taken place as yet.

It was noted that the Minutes of the Organisational Improvement Committee Meeting held on 16 October 2013 would be presented to the November Board Meeting.

The Interim Chief Executive highlighted the challenge for NIFRS in going forward would be to ensure that service delivery is maintained.

The Chairman commended the huge amount of work carried out by the whole Organisation to enable the recommendations to be closed, including policies being updated and the progression of procurement issues. He stated that the Organisation was moving in the right direction.

### **Desertcreat Project**

Members noted a Briefing Note providing an update on the Desertcreat Project. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford advised Members that the Executive had given approval for the Desertcreat programme. He outlined that a detailed presentation would be given to the Board on Desertcreat following official confirmation of approval of the programme is received from the Executive. He stated that the final Business Case would also be prepared.

Following a query from Mr Kerr in relation to security of the site at Desertcreat, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that a review was underway in relation to security and that meetings were ongoing with the Fire Brigades' Union.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford advised Members that Mr Brian Gregory had taken over as Programme Director and stated that Mr Gregory would be invited to attend the presentation to the Board.

**Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items**

**Public Accounts Committee Report on NIFRS:  
An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and  
Report on Accounts 2011-2012**

Deferred to the end of the Meeting.

**NIFRS Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report**

Members noted NIFRS Quarterly Corporate Performance Management Report for the period April to September 2013. The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs gave a brief overview of the report.

**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.

**Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items**

**Public Accounts Committee Report on NIFRS:  
An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and  
Report on Accounts 2011-2012**

Members noted the Public Accounts Committee Report on NIFRS: An Organisational Assessment and Review of Departmental Oversight and Report on Accounts 2011-2012.

The Chairman referred to the Executive Summary of the Report and expressed disappointment that members of the Public Accounts Committee had barely touched on the 2011 NIAO Organisational Assessment and had focused almost entirely on staffing issues covered in the Report on Accounts 2011-12.

Mrs Rice expressed concern that the PAC Report suggests that the Audit & Risk Management Committee had not been fulfilling their responsibility, in terms of resourcing of the Internal Audit Function. She pointed out that the Audit & Risk Management Committee had recognised the need for a full review of the Internal Audit Function.

Members expressed their disappointment at the PAC Report and outlined there were a number of inaccuracies within the Report, and expressed concern that NIFRS was not getting recognition for the level of improvements which has taken place since 2011 to improve the Organisation. Members suggested the need for the Report to be challenged.

The Chairman referred to his correspondence to the PAC, dated 12 August 2013, which was circulated to Members for their information.

A full and frank discussion took place in respect of the 11 Recommendations from the Report.

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At this point,  
the Corporate Communications Manager left the Meeting

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Discussion took place on recruitment of senior management posts and the opportunity for NIFRS to open up to attract quality internal and external candidates.

Mr Kerr requested that the Corporate Management Team structure be included on the Agenda for the December Board Meeting.

Members noted that a Board decision was required as to how they should respond to the Recommendations within the PAC Report.

The Interim Chief Executive advised Members that DHSSPS would formally seek a response on each of the Recommendations by the end of the week, NIFRS response would be prepared collectively by the Corporate Management Team. He explained the response would subsequently be forwarded to PAC.

With respect to Recommendation 11, Members noted that DHSSPS would take the lead on how to respond to this Recommendation.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that DHSSPS may write to the Chairman separately with regards to the Board Recommendations. Members agreed that it was important to respond collectively as a Board to each of the Recommendations. The Chairman thanked Members for their input into the Recommendations.

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THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS  
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED  
AT 5.10 PM

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