

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

17 DECEMBER 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
Mr C Mack
Ald Mrs G Rice

APOLOGIES: Mr M Kerr

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)
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Finance
Mr D Moore, Director of Human Resources
Mrs L Cuddy, Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs
Mrs U McCambridge, Corporate Communications Manager
Mrs B Walker, Procurement Manager
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS Observer

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 – 26 November 2013

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

At this point,
Mr J Millar joined the Meeting

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

Special Finance Committee – Minutes – 26 November 2013

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee held 26 November 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.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that it had also been necessary to re-evaluate the tenders for the contract for BA Pods and sought Members' approval to present an additional Item of Business at the end of the Meeting. Members agreed.

Item 5: Chairman's Business

Appointment of Chairman and Board Members

The Chairman advised Members that the DHSSPS Minister's Office had informed him this morning he is not in a position to appoint a new Chairman and 2 new Members to the NIFRS Board at this time. He explained that the Minister had asked him to stay on as Chairman of the Board until the appointment process has been completed and a new Chairman appointed. He advised Members that he has agreed to the Minister's request.

Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool

Members noted a copy of the Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool which DHSSPS sponsored Arm's Length Bodies (ALB) are required to complete for the period 2013/14.

The Chairman commented that last year had been the first year this exercise had been undertaken and it had been about establishing a baseline for the Board. He noted that the completion of at least one case study is mandatory from 2013/14 onwards.

At this point,
the Director of Human Resources joined the Meeting

The Chairman reminded Members how the self-assessment exercise had been conducted for 2012/13 when the exercise had been progressed by a Working Group consisting of himself, 2 Board Members and 3 members of Support Staff. He proposed a similar process for the 2013/14 exercise.

During discussion, Members expressed concern regarding the timeframe for the completion of the self-assessment given the capacity within the Board currently. Mr J Barbour, whilst noting progress made in addressing red flags highlighted within the 2012/13 exercise, expressed concern in relation to the level of work still to be progressed in addressing outstanding action points.

The Interim Chief Executive highlighted the need to factor other elements into the self-assessment exercise such as the work ongoing with respect to the Board and Committee structures, etc. He also pointed out the need for an updated training needs analysis for Members which would form an integral part of this process. Referring to Members' concerns regarding the progressing of actions, the Interim Chief Executive assured Members that the completed assessment would be a "live" document monitored and progressed in conjunction with the review of the Board and Committee structures, etc.

Provisional Dates for Meetings of the NIFRS Board

The Chairman referred to the list of provisional dates for Meetings of the Board in 2014 and explained that the structure of meetings would be considered in the New Year as part of the overall review of the structure of the Board and its Committees.

National Joint Council Meeting

Members noted that Mr Hanna, Vice-Chairman of the Board, was scheduled to attend a meeting of the National Joint Council. In light of the change to the Chairman's position, Members were content that the Chairman also attends this Meeting.

The Chairman gave Members an overview of the current position with respect to the Pensions issue and the ongoing industrial action in England and Wales. He stressed the importance of the meeting in January.

Mr J Barbour noted the position of the Fire Brigades' Union regarding the issue. He highlighted also the level of work being conducted in the background.

DHSSPS Observer

The Chairman welcome the attendance of an observer from DHSSPS especially given the level of scrutiny currently in place and the Department's accountability role.

Mr Hanna welcomed Dr McKee staying on as Chairman of the Board particularly given the Organisation's position currently.

Referring to the issue of governance and its importance in the current climate, Mr Hanna stressed the need for the Working Group undertaking the self-assessment exercise to meet in January to get the exercise underway. He acknowledged the effect on the Board of having 2 Members less which was already causing difficulties with quorums for meetings, etc. He suggested that it may be necessary to convene joint Committee Meetings in order to maximise Members' availability and to ensure business is progressed.

During discussion in relation to capacity within the Board and the lack of appointments to the Board, the Interim Chief Executive expressed his concern also in relation to not having the full complement of Members and its impact on business continuity. He referred to the work being undertaken and progressed by the Corporate Management Team and highlighted that there would be proposals going forward which will need decisions to be taken by the Board. He stated he was hopeful of the resilience within the Board to ensure business is progressed.

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 key points as follows:

- Operational Assurance and Audit – noted;
- Operational Response and Performance for the month of November noted;
- Key Achievements Comprehensive Assurance Review of all Area Commands and uniformed Headquarters Directorates completed; IRMP Project Plan for 2014 completed – briefing paper to be circulated to Members for information; and Active Operational Monitoring introduced.

Mrs Rice reported positively on a Community Safety presentation delivered by a member of NIFRS personnel at a recent meeting of a local Policing & Community Safety Partnership (PCSP). She explained that the Group were keen to try and organise something further and she acknowledged that this would be an opportunity to promote further NIFRS safety messages. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford welcomed Mrs Rice's comments and undertook to progress the matter.

Director of Operational Support

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

- Main & Uniform Stores – new Stores Manager and Stores Officer due to be in post by 1 January 2014 – Stores Manager appointment will greatly assist in the development of the new Logistics Centre due to be built at Boucher Road; noted that with the goodwill of Stores personnel, roll-out of PBI Gold nearing completion;
- Transport & Engineering Services – procurement update noted including the procurement of replacement equipment for detecting persons trapped;
- Training – update noted including the procurement of additional training for ship firefighting;

- Regional Control Centre (RCC) – discussions at an advance stage with the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service in respect of a formal mutual aid agreement to cater for assistance in spate conditions such as flooding. Members noted that it is hoped to extend this agreement to Dublin Fire Brigade.

Referring to the distribution of fire kit, the Chairman asked that the Board's appreciation be extended to Stores personnel.

Director of Community Protection

Members noted the report from the Director of Community Protection. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford highlighted the key points from his Report –

- Community Safety – Business Case and procurement for use of volunteers completed and contract awarded to Volunteer Now. Training programme has been developed and uniform is being procured; the Corporate Management Team have agreed in principle to consider the possibility of engaging with sponsorship as a means of generating income to deliver community engagement activities;
- Health & Safety – update with respect to attempts to secure a further peer review of Health & Safety from CFOA in 2014 to supplement the Operational Peer Assessment;
- Emergency Response – guidance being re-issued to operational personnel with regard to incendiary devices;
- Retained Issues – Retained Availability System – work progressing in line with Project Plan; first round of training complete;
- Road Safety, Occupational Health and ICT updates noted.

Referring to the current position with respect to a replacement Occupational Health Scheme, Mr J Barbour stressed the need for this matter to be progressed and a Scheme put back in place given the knock-on effect on sickness absence, pensions, etc.

The Chairman commented on the benefits of having access to a private health scheme and questioned whether NIFRS could make a special case for a scheme to be put in place. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford explained that it would be necessary to have an Occupational Health Scheme in place before consideration could be given to a private health scheme.

The Chairman referred to the possibility of engaging with sponsorship as a means of income generation and outlined his concerns. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford commented on the sponsorship secured during WPF 2013 and stated that he felt, with robust guidance and procedures, sponsorship was feasible. He stated that a paper would be presented to the Corporate Management Team for consideration initially. He added that NIFRS would need to engage with DHSSPS in relation to the management of income generation and noted that FRSs across the UK have established schemes.

With respect to Retained Issues, the Chairman requested a presentation from the Retained Project Board to update Members on progress.

Director of Finance

The Report from the Director of Finance was noted. The Director of Finance gave Members a detailed overview of the information presented highlighting that the revenue budget for the 8 months ended 30 November shows an underspend of £361k.

In relation to the capital budget, the Director of Finance informed Members that following discussions with the Corporate Management Team, NIFRS have declared an easement of £459k.

Mr J Barbour referred to overtime expenditure and, whilst accepting that on occasions there is no alternative but to incur overtime costs, expressed concern as it was difficult to establish the actual expenditure relating to overtime.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer referred to discussions within the Corporate Management Team with respect to overtime expenditure and explained that the Corporate Management Team was working towards a balanced budget position. He further explained that he will be bringing a proposal to the Corporate Management Team, and subsequently the Board, for sickness absence within the Organisation in the future not to be supported with overtime and stressed the need to develop other coping mechanisms. He highlighted that overtime costs had been reduced by 19% in 2012/13 and accepted the need to continue to reduce overtime costs. He explained that as part of IRMP, NIFRS will be looking at resource allocations.

Mr Hanna commented on the level of underspend currently and expressed concern regarding the budget position especially given the concerns raised originally regarding the level of NIFRS budget allocation. The Director of Finance explained that the Corporate Management Team was endeavouring to reach a balanced position and establishing where best to utilise funding in the last quarter.

Director of HR

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources provided a summary of the key points which included:

- Attendance Management Update – noted overall level of absence has fallen again slightly;
- Recruitment & Selection Update – 28 Wholetime Trainees will commence training in January; interview for post of Head of HR Advisory scheduled to take place this week;
- Discipline, Grievance and HR Policy Development Updates noted.

Mr J Barbour welcomed the resolution of the 11 outstanding Grievances relating to Fire & Rescue Service Headquarters.

Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs

Members noted the Report from the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs. The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs gave Members an overview of the key information presented including:

- Capital Projects – Omagh Project – to date, works are on programme with an anticipated completion date of mid-March 2014; communications plan being developed in preparation for construction completion, this will include a Board visit to the site;
- Estates – Interim Assets & Facilities Manager appointed and will take-up post on 6 January 2014;
- Procurement – update noted;
- Planning, KPIs – Draft NIFRS Corporate Business Plan for 2014/15 currently being developed; summary of key tasks for the remainder of 2013/14, including recommendations from external reviews, identified and prioritised for each Directorate; noted that 70% of the recommendations contained within the Combined Recommendations Schedule completed – a lot of good work being progressed;
- Media Enquiries – update noted.

The Chairman stated that he was conscious of concerns around NIFRS policies. Noting that NIFRS have a huge raft of policies, he questioned the potential for a small unit to be established to review NIFRS policies.

The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs explained that an Information Governance Project would be commencing and that part of the terms of reference for the project will include consideration of the area of policies. Members noted that the Information Governance Project would also be considering document management and that the Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs would be discussing with the Corporate Management Team the possibility of appointing an interim Project Manager to progress same.

The Interim Chief Executive referred to Annex 3 of the Finance Report which provided a detailed analysis of financial performance by expenditure type and commented that the budget was not sustainable. He highlighted that a significant element of the expenditure was attributable to salaries and stated that if NIFRS continued to recruit to its establishment numbers funding could have to be taken from other areas of the Service's budget which would have repercussions elsewhere in the Organisation. He stated that the Corporate Management Team are looking at options and pointed out that difficult decisions will have to be taken to meet the financial challenges. However, he assured Members that the safety of Firefighters and the public would not be compromised.

The Interim Chief Executive expressed his appreciation to the Chairman and the Board for their support and to his Corporate Management Team colleagues for the volume and quality of work progressed during the year.

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 the approval letter for the addendum to the Business Case had been received and would be circulated with the January Board papers.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford provided a synopsis of the key issues emanating from the Project and also updated Members on progress to date.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford answered Members' questions regarding the project and noted the Board's ongoing concerns with respect to security issues.

The Meeting noted that Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford would present the final Business Case for NI Community Safety College to the Board.

The Chairman referred to the Risk Register for the Desertcreat Project and stressed the need for the Board to have sight of the Register. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford explained that the Risk Register was being reviewed in order to develop a template for the sharing of information.

Item 8: Relevant Correspondence

The Interim Chief Fire Officer informed Members that NIFRS had been advised that a Watch Commander from the Specialist Rescue Team had been awarded a Fleur Lombard Bursary.

Fleur Lombard was the first female Firefighter to lose her life on duty in peacetime Britain at an operational incident on Sunday, 4 February 1996. To commemorate her sacrifice, a special bursary fund was established to advance the education of junior members of the Fire & Rescue Service by the granting of a bursary to travel and study FRS related issues elsewhere in the UK, Europe or worldwide.

It was agreed that the Chairman would forward a letter of congratulations on behalf of the Board.

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At this point,
the Procurement Manager joined the Meeting

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Additional Item of Business – Contract for BA Pods

The Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs advised Members that the Finance Committee, at its Meeting on 25 June 2013, had accepted the Evaluation Panel recommendation to award the contract for the supply and delivery of BA Pods. Subsequently, NIFRS was advised of a change in the trading position of the successful Bidder and as a consequence re-evaluated its position with regard to the decision previously made.

The Procurement Manager explained that an Evaluation Panel had been reconvened to re-evaluate the Tenders. Mr Hanna, Chairman of the Panel, outlined the evaluation exercise which had been undertaken by the Panel. Members noted that the Panel had recommended the Contract for 6 BA Pods be awarded to Angloco Limited.

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

Resolved: “to accept the recommendation of the Evaluation Panel and award the Contract for 6 BA Pods to Angloco Limited”.

Item 9: Sealing of Documents

There were no Documents for sealing.

Item 10: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

The Chairman expressed his appreciation to everyone for their support during the year and on behalf of the Board, extended best wishes for a happy, safe and peaceful Christmas period.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 3.35 PM
