

**NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING**

**26 NOVEMBER 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 M Kerr  
Ald Mrs G Rice

**APOLOGIES:** Mr C Mack  
Mr J Wallace, Interim Chief Executive

**IN ATTENDANCE:** 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  
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary  
Mrs C Murdock, Chief Executive's Department  
Dr B Gregory, Programme Director, Desertcreat Project  
Mr J Creighton, Public Attendee

**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: Desertcreat Project**

The Chairman welcomed Dr Bryan Gregory, Programme Director, Desertcreat Project, to the Meeting.

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At this point,  
the Interim Chief Fire Officer and Mr J Creighton joined the Meeting

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Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave a detailed presentation updating Members on the current position with respect to the Desertcreat Project.

Mrs Rice outlined ongoing concerns around security issues and the potential impact of same on revenue generation. She also expressed concern that the Board is not receiving a copy of the Risk Register given the level of input from NIFRS.

Dr Gregory assured Members that PSNI were addressing the security issues. With respect to revenue generation, he explained that the Business Case for the Project did not rely on revenue generation. He stated that those delivering and receiving the training were the key stakeholders.

Referring to the Risk Register, Dr Gregory accepted that as a major stakeholder NIFRS should be aware of the risks and explained that he was developing a Risk Register template which would enable the sharing of risk information. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford also highlighted that a summary of the risks was contained within the NI Community Safety College Programme Board Highlight Report.

During discussion, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford and Dr Gregory answered Members' questions regarding various aspects of the Project which included sustainability, range of courses to be provided including life long learning and buying-in of courses and provision of accommodation. The Chairman explained why he felt the potential for revenue generation should not be precluded.

Mr J Barbour referred to the assurances given relating to security on site and stated that the Fire Brigades' Union and its members were not reassured. He stated he would also require evidence of extrapolation of footfall figures for the College, as future sustainability was as important as the level of training facilities provided. Referring to the cost of consultancy fees, Mr Barbour sought clarification as to the final costs. The Chairman told the Board that a member of PSNI Senior Management Team had assured him that PSNI would take up the full security costs when the College became operational.

Following further discussion, the Chairman assured Dr Gregory of the Board's commitment to the Project.

Dr Gregory indicated that he was willing to attend future Meetings and provide briefings as and when required.

The Chairman referred to the scrutiny being experienced by NIFRS and stressed the need for the Board to be cognisant of risks associated with the Project. Dr Gregory undertook to provide the revised Risk Register template for the information of the Board.

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At this point,  
Dr Gregory left the Meeting

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#### **Item 4: Minutes – 22 October 2013**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 October 2013, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Cllr D Barbour.

#### **Item 5: Reports from Board Committees, including adoption of Committee Minutes**

##### **Finance Committee – Meeting – 26 November 2013**

Members noted that a Special Meeting of the Finance Committee had been held prior to the Board Meeting.

Mr Kerr, Chairman of the Finance Committee, informed Members that the Meeting had been convened to ratify the decision of the Evaluation Panel following the re-evaluation of the Tenders for the award of the Contract for WRLs. Members noted that the Contract had been awarded to Emergency One.

#### **Item 6: Chairman's Business**

##### **Appointment of Chairman and Board Members**

The Chairman updated Members on the current position with respect to the appointment of a new Chairman and 2 Members to the Board. Members noted that the Public Appointments Unit's recommendations were currently with the Minister and a decision was awaited.

During discussion regarding the appointments, Members expressed concern regarding the timeframe for the appointments and the impact on progressing Board and Committee business. Mr J Barbour suggested that the Chairman write to DHSSPS outlining Members' concerns and emphasising the need to expedite the new appointments to the Board.

The Chairman acknowledged Members' concerns and explained that he had been considering writing formally to DHSSPS. He referred to the interim arrangements which are due to expire in February and suggested that any proposed letter would also tie-in his concerns regarding this matter. He noted that he had communicated the Board's views on the existing interim arrangements and proposed options for the way forward in August. Whilst noting that informal discussions had been held with DHSSPS, he expressed concern that the timeframe for moving forward was now critical.

During discussion regarding the issue of the interim arrangements, Mrs Grant referred to the level of scrutiny currently directed at NIFRS and emphasised the need for the Board to have its full complement of Members. With regard to the interim arrangements she expressed concern that whilst this decision was outwith the control of the Board, the Board could well be criticised for lack of progress.

During further discussion, Members also expressed concern regarding the absence of a DHSSPS observer at today's Meeting. The Chairman stated that this matter had been raised at the recent Accountability Meeting and explained that DHSSPS had commented that they were considering not sending observers. The Chairman informed Members that he had advised DHSSPS why he felt it was necessary for a DHSSPS observer to be in attendance at relevant Board and Committee Meetings.

### **CIPFA Annual Governance Conference**

The Chairman informed Members of his attendance at the recent CIPFA Annual Governance Conference. He referred in particular to a presentation delivered by Francesca West regarding Whistleblowing and explained that he felt it would be beneficial for Members to have the opportunity to also receive the presentation at an early date.

### **Item 7: 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:

- Operational Performance noted;
- Operational Assurance and Audit – update noted. District Audit process had been temporarily suspended to provide OPI the opportunity to progress identified areas of improvement from the process and to review the current Audit criteria; Audits welcomed in preparation for Fire Peer Review to be conducted next September;
- Operational Issues of Note – Standards of Response – NIFRS Performance Standards - DHSSPS satisfied with how NIFRS is managing same and the way forward for service delivery; the Interim Chief Fire Officer commented on the current position with respect to reporting on Standards of Response and the need to identify shift patterns within the reporting mechanisms;
- Operational Risk Analysis – IRMP Programme Board established to co-ordinate multi-disciplinary IRMP projects; Year 2 and 3 Operational Risk Management Plan developed - will be presented to Board for approval;
- Key Achievements – NIFRS Officer selected to be part of National Peer Review Team; Operational Projects all on target.

Referring to Emergent Issues, the Interim Chief Fire Officer informed Members of concerns regarding the lack of availability of end of life vehicles and the impact of the lack of training on RTC operational capability. He noted that he would be presenting a paper to the Board on this matter.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer also highlighted concerns with regard to the impact on personnel's health and welfare as a result of the high levels of work being undertaken and explained that he had initiated a review with the Area Commanders. Members noted that the Interim Chief Fire Officer would be presenting a paper to the Board in respect of this issue.

The Chairman supported the Interim Chief Fire Officer's comments in relation to the impact of the high levels of work being undertaken by personnel. Mr J Barbour advised the Meeting that the Fire Brigades' Union had raised these issues in recent correspondence and outlined the Union's concerns with regard to the lack of scrap cars and the impact of lack of training. He highlighted that the Union had also raised concerns regarding the issue of workloads. He suggested the need for a Meeting of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee to be convened as soon as possible.

**It was agreed that a Meeting of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee be convened within the next 4 weeks.**

### **Director of Operational Support**

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

- Technical Research & Development – updates on progress in relation to research project to identify alternative uses for condemned structural fire kit, provision of new generation heavy rescue hydraulic equipment, Compressed Air Foam (CAFS) project and the framework for the procurement of structural fire kit;
- Main & Uniform Stores – updates on progress with respect to vacant Stores Manager and Stores Officer post and distribution of PBI Gold;
- Transport & Engineering Services – updates on Services/Inspections/Waiting Times, Asset tracking, capital purchasing noted;
- Regional Control Centre (RCC) – update noted;
- Operational Training – update noted.

The Chairman sought an update with respect to BA defects. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen outlined the current position explaining that HSENI had been advised of the issue and explained that the supplier was working with NIFRS to resolve the confidence issues.

The Chairman referred to NIFRS “good news” stories and suggested the need for NIFRS to host a reception to highlight its achievements and also suggested a number of potential venues.

Mr J Barbour referred to previous discussions regarding this matter and reminded Members that it had been agreed to host an event at the Long Gallery. He suggested that a small Working Group be established to progress same, eg, the Interim Chief Executive, Interim Chief Fire Officer, Corporate Communications and a Board Member. He indicated that he would be interested in assisting.

Mrs Rice supported Mr Barbour's proposal stating that it was important to demonstrate the good work of NIFRS.

**The Members requested that the Interim Chief Fire Officer progress the hosting of a reception at the Long Gallery.**

Mrs Rice noted that NIFRS would require a sponsor for the reception.

## **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 are liaising with NI Housing Executive regarding Owner Occupied HMOs in Self Contained Flats;
- Firework Safety Campaign – reported positively on the Campaign delivered in partnership between DHSSPS, DoJ, NIFRS and PSNI;
- A Prince's Trust 'Get Started' Scheme – reported positively on the first Scheme which had taken place 18-22 November. He noted that NIFRS have been asked by the Prince's Trust to develop a mentoring scheme on a voluntary basis;
- NIFRS supported HSENI launch of Carbon Monoxide Awareness Month at Stormont on 5 November 2013;
- Health, Safety & Emergency Response update noted;
- GD92 update on progress;
- ICT update – current position with respect to the Business Case for consultancy support for Command & Control System, TETRA, Retained Availability System and E-recruitment;
- Occupational Health Scheme - DHSSPS are liaising with NIFRS in relation to the procurement of a replacement Scheme;
- 2013 WPFPG - won 'Positive Belfast' award as part of the Aishling Awards;
- Road Safety Week – Event plan noted. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford highlighted the need for access to scrap cars as part of road safety awareness events;
- Community Engagement – liaising with PSNI in relation to youth engagement.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer highlighted the impact and level of work being undertaken and progressed, especially given the high level of activity this year and expressed his appreciation to Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford.

## **Director of Finance**

The Report from the Director of Finance was noted. The Director of Finance gave Members an overview of the information presented and noted that, as reported at the October 2013 Board Meeting, NIFRS has a Departmental revenue budget allocation, in respect of 2013-14, of £74.594m plus a further £350k other income which can be retained, resulting in a total available allocation of £74m. She explained that it is expected that this budget allocation will not change for the remainder of the financial year, with the exception of a further £53.5k allocation due, prior to the year end, in respect of G8 funding from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Director of Finance highlighted that currently the revenue budget for the 7 months ended 31 October shows an underspend of £223k. She assured Members that Management Accounts continues to meet budget holders on a monthly basis and monitor (and adjust if required) the profiling of budgets in line with anticipated timing of expenditure. She also highlighted work within the Corporate Management Team to address same.

Referring to the underspend, the Director of Finance drew Members' attention to concerns regarding the Training budget given the level of funding still to be spent and stressed that this matter is being closely monitored.

The Chairman expressed his concern with regard to the issue of underspends. He acknowledged that there had been a lot of changes in personnel during the year but pointed out that he will be reminding the Interim Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team of the Estates position at the end of the last financial year and the need to closely monitor budgets. He, however, highlighted that NIFRS has always been responsible regarding the management of its budgets.

During discussion in relation to the underspend in training, Mrs Rice emphasised the need to ensure personnel are trained and sought assurance that the funding would be spent. The Director of Finance noted that budget holders have plans in place to ensure that this level of training is completed before the year end and acknowledged Mr Hanna's comments regarding the need to be aware of the potential impact of overtime to meet training requirements.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer noted the impact of procurement difficulties on training plans and accepted that progressing the required level of training will have an impact on overtime costs.

The Director of Finance gave Members a brief overview of the current position with respect to the Capital budget noting that the Accounts for the period ending 31 October 2013 are indicating a Service-wide underspend of £117k. She explained that a review of all in year capital projects has been undertaken and the Corporate Management Team are considering capital priorities, together with which projects can realistically be delivered in year. Members noted that DHSSPS had been advised of the position and have indicated that funding can be allocated to other projects.

The Director of Finance answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

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At this point,  
Mrs Rice left the Meeting

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## **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 including:

- Support Staff Recruitment update – Stores Manager appointment imminent; Stores Officer interviews scheduled for the end of this week; applications for Equipment Workshop Supervisor and Technical Support Officer closed 15 November; hope to advertise Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs in near future;
- Update with respect to 7 HR Directorate posts – Head of Human Resources Advisory shortlisting scheduled to take place on 29 November with interviews scheduled for 18/19 December; shortlisting for other posts will take place in December;

- Wholetime Firefighter recruitment – conditional offers to 30 Trainees to commence employment on 20 January 2014;
- Attendance Management update – overall level of absence has fallen significantly;
- Discipline/Grievance/Tribunal Cases update – noted that all outstanding Grievances have been resolved;
- Policy Development update noted.

The Chairman welcomed the progress with respect to the outstanding Grievance cases and expressed his appreciation for all the work undertaken to reach a resolution.

### **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 synopsis of the information presented including:

- Capital Projects update – Logistics Support Centre – DHSSPS have announced capital allocation of £3m for this project; Business Case to appoint Design Team approved;
- Estates update – interim Manager to be recruited to review capability, capacity and functioning; Operational Asset Appraisal Survey – work will commence 25 November 2013 and is due to be completed in February 2014;
- Procurement update – current position with regard to BSO and legislative changes noted;
- Information Management – Project Group to be set up to take this forward.

Members noted updates with respect to Planning and KPIs, Assembly Questions, etc, and media enquiries and PR activity.

### **Item 8: Standing Items**

#### **Organisational Improvement Committee**

Members noted the Minutes of the Meeting of the Organisational Improvement Committee held on 16 October 2013.

The Chairman stated that he was satisfied with the progress attained. He referred to the concerns raised with regard to Pay Remits and noted that this issue had now been resolved.

The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs updated the Meeting on the current position with respect to DHSSPS verification of Recommendations which NIFRS considered closed.

Referring to the PAC Report, the Chairman informed Members that, as yet, he had received no correspondence seeking a Board response to the Report.

## **Item 9: Strategic Standalone Items**

### **NIFRS Unwanted Fire Signals Policy**

Members noted NIFRS False Alarm & Unwanted Fire Signals Policy.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave Members an overview of the salient points within the Policy. He outlined NIFRS approach to the management of false alarms/unwanted fire signals. He also outlined NIFRS operational response to calls arising from automatic fire alarm (AFA) actuations.

During discussion regarding NIFRS approach to dealing with regular offenders and the possibility of levying charges, Members expressed the view that there was a need for a more robust approach to dealing with the worst offenders and questioned whether Councillors should be lobbying for stronger legislation. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford stated that NIFRS do not currently have the ability to charge for services and stressed that the current legislation was appropriate to deal with the worst offenders.

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At this point,  
Cllr D Barbour left the Meeting

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The Board, on the motion of Cllr Carr, seconded by Mr Kerr, unanimously –

**Resolved: “to approve NIFRS False Alarm & Unwanted Fire Signals Policy”.**

### **NIFRS Social Media Policy**

Members noted NIFRS Social Media Policy. The Corporate Communications Manager explained that the Policy had undergone consultation and a copy of the final Policy had been circulated for information.

In response to a question from Cllr Carr, the Corporate Communications Manager explained that individual Stations are not permitted to have their own NIFRS social media accounts, including unofficial social media accounts. She further explained that NIFRS official social media accounts, currently Facebook and Twitter, would be managed centrally.

### **Annual Progress Reporting**

Members noted copies of the Annual Progress Reporting Summary as at September 2013 and the Annual Business Plan Progress Report - Quarter 2 (April-September 2013).

The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs explained that the Performance Team was in the process of meeting with each Directorate to discuss progress and added that this was running in tandem with the drafting of next year’s Business Plan.

**Item 10: Relevant Correspondence**

The Chairman advised Members that he had received a note of appreciation from Oliver McMullan MLA following his recent illness.

**Item 11: Sealing of Documents**

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Emergency One (UK) Limited – supply and delivery of up to 9 WRLs.

**Item 12: Schedule of Future Meetings**

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

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THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS  
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED  
AT 4.35 PM

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