

# NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

## MINUTES OF A MEETING

28 JANUARY 2014

1.30 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Cllr D Barbour  
Mr C Mack

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wallace, Interim Chief Executive  
Mr J Allen, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Operational Support)  
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Finance  
Mr D Moore, Director of Human Resources  
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary  
Mrs C Murdock, Chief Executive's Department  
Mr D Jordan, 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 – 17 December 2013**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 December 2013, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr J Barbour, seconded by Mr Carr.

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

#### **Remuneration Committee – Meeting – 28 January 2014**

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

The Chairman reported on the Business discussed at the Committee Meeting which had dealt specifically with Job Evaluation matters.

## **Item 5: Chairman's Business**

### **National Joint Council Matters**

The Chairman, accompanied by the Vice-Chairman, Alan Hanna, reported positively on their attendance at a meeting of an informal group of the National Joint Council to discuss key items including co-responding/collaborative working between emergency services and pensions.

### **Interim Governance Arrangements**

-----  
At this point,  
the Interim Chief Executive, Interim Chief Fire Officer  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen and the Director of Finance  
left the Meeting  
-----

The Chairman reminded Members of correspondence forwarded to DHSSPS in August regarding succession planning at Chair/Board level and at which time he had also raised the matter of the interim arrangements. He informed Members of recent discussions with DHSSPS regarding the interim arrangements during which it was acknowledged that the arrangements identified by the Board in May 2012, ie, the appointment of an Interim Chief Executive (Accounting Officer) and the appointment of the Deputy Chief Fire Officer as Interim Chief Fire Officer, had delivered effective management structures.

The Chairman noted that the interim arrangements come to an end in February 2014. He acknowledged the significant progress achieved during the past 18 months as the Board addressed recommendations emanating from the various published reports and dealt with the many legacy issues. He stated, however, there was still work in hand and a need for a further period of stability to implement the remaining outstanding recommendations from the published reports and to imbed these effectively across the Organisation.

The Chairman outlined to Members the current position with respect to the Interim Chief Executive's secondment and explained that, as NIFRS is still in a period of transition and to maintain stability and cohesion, it is proposed to extend the existing arrangements for a further fixed-term period of 24 months with effect from 1 April 2014. He advised Members that Mr Kerr is content to continue in his interim role of Director of Operations. He also advised Members that the Minister and DHSSPS supported the proposal as they were convinced that to extend the interim arrangements was the best feasible option at this time.

During discussion, Members welcomed the extension of the interim arrangements for a further fixed-term period but emphasised the need for the Board to have DHSSPS authorisation formally given the exceptional circumstances.

The Chairman assured Members that DHSSPS were very supportive of the extension of the interim arrangements and explained that he was working closely with the Director of Human Resources and DHSSPS to ensure all the relevant documentation is in place.

The Director of Human Resources reminded Members of the tenure for the interim arrangements and stressed the need for future decisions to be made in a timely fashion.

The Chairman stated that it is expected that a decision regarding the substantive long-term Senior Management structure will be taken within 15 months, by June 2015, so that the post can be advertised and filled by 1 April 2016.

Mr Hanna welcomed the extension of the interim arrangements and expressed his appreciation to the Chairman for all his work. He expressed concern, however, in relation to cover for the Accounting Officer role during the period between the end of the current arrangements and the commencement of the new fixed-term arrangements and suggested the need for this to be raised with DHSSPS. Mr Hanna also referred to the tenure of the Board which ends in September and commented that the implications of succession planning for the Board needed to be factored into the timeframes for progressing matters pertaining to the senior management structure.

Mrs Rice concurred with Mr Hanna's comments and suggested the need to seek confirmation from DHSSPS regarding the timeframe for progressing appointments to the Board.

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

**Resolved:** “to agree, in principle, the extension of the existing interim arrangements for a further fixed period of 24 months, subject to approval being sought formally from DHSSPS”.

-----

At this point,  
the Interim Chief Executive, Interim Chief Fire Officer  
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen and the Director of Finance  
rejoined the Meeting

-----

The Chairman informed the Officers that the Board had agreed, in principle, to extend the interim arrangements for a further fixed period of 24 months and that he was working closely with the Director of Human Resources, DHSSPS and the Minister's Office to ensure all the necessary documentation is in place.

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

### **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 Performance noted;

- Operational Assurance and Audit – update noted. The Interim Chief Fire Officer explained that NIFRS was moving from quarterly audits to twice yearly reviews and that a suite of documents pertaining to Operational Assurance & Audit would be presented to the Service Delivery & Performance Committee;
- Operational Issues of Note – Standards of Response – the Interim Chief Fire Officer reiterated his concerns with regard to the current position with respect to reporting on Standards of Response and the need for flexibility to relocate resources. He also stated he would welcome the introduction of a Standard of Response for RTCs;
- Operational Risk Analysis – update noted – the Interim Chief Fire Officer gave Members a brief overview of FSEC Risk Profiling ‘Base Case’ and pilot Station Area Risk Profiling Exercises completed in January;
- Emergent Issues and Update on Control Measures – the Interim Chief Fire Officer provided a synopsis of an issue concerning the roof of the Appliance Room in Carrickfergus Fire Station. Members noted that a Business Continuity Plan has been fully implemented since 17 January 2014 and emergency cover is unaffected. It was also noted that NIFRS Estates Department is co-ordinating temporary work to support the roof pending a permanent solution to the matter;
- Key Achievements – Operational Risk Management Plan - 5 of the 14 projects have been completed, with a further 6 on target for completion by 31 March 2014; Assurance and Accountability Review of Area Commands, FRSTC and FRSHQ Uniformed Directorates completed forming part of NIFRS Self-Assessment process for LGA/CFOA Peer Review Assessment programmed for September 2014.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer informed Members that from 2 January to 6 January NIFRS had been heavily engaged in contingency plans for emergency response to events resulting from both severe weather and unprecedented sea levels due to tidal surges with severe risk of coastal flooding. He highlighted the positive feedback from NIFRS’ multi-agency partners, elected representatives and the general public which is indicative of the high regard in which NIFRS is held in the wider community and is testimony to the professionalism and commitment of all those involved.

Mr Carr reported positively on his visit to Silver Command during the period of the contingency plans and commended all those involved. He commented on the need for more education around flooding and its consequences.

### **Director of Operational Support**

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operational Support. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen gave Members an overview of the information presented –

- Technical Research & Development – updates on progress with respect to capital projects including the procurement of LACES (Line Access Casualty Extrication System) replacement of rope rescue equipment which is in line with national best practice; potential for the provision of additional gas monitoring systems for all frontline appliances to manage the increasing incidents of carbon monoxide related incidents;
- Transport & Engineering Services – updates on Services/Inspections/Waiting Times, Asset tracking, capital purchasing noted;
- Regional Control Centre (RCC) – Mobilising Performance noted;

- Operational Training – update noted. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Officer Allen updated Members on the current position with respect to the procurement of FPOS and First-Aid training courses.

Mr J Barbour referred to Equality & Diversity training and highlighted the need for robust training for all personnel.

The Director of Human Resources advised Members that the delivery of tailored training sessions would be a key element of the role of the new HR Business Partners.

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

Members agreed to take Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items - Committee Structure as the next Item of Business

### **Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items Committee Structure**

The Chairman commented on the need for any organisation to review, challenge and improve. He referred to the Board's scrutiny role, and the quality of this scrutiny, having been challenged. He expressed his view that the key work is done at Committee level and urged the need to review the Board/Committee structure to ensure it is fit for purpose and to identify any potential areas for improvement. He stated that whilst there had been no implied/actual criticism regarding how the Board's Committees have operated in the past, as it has been in the spotlight there is a need, therefore, to address the matter.

Members noted a paper setting out proposals for consideration in relation to the Board's Committees, their membership, structures and frequency of Meetings.

The Interim Chief Executive outlined the background to the review of the Committee structure and the development of the proposals explaining that he had tried to ensure a close alignment of the Committees with individual Directorates to demonstrate the 'golden thread' which is often looked for in good governance arrangements.

The Interim Chief Executive gave Members a detailed overview of the proposals for the Committee structure which would result in the retention of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee as the Service Delivery Committee; the combining of the Finance and Human Resources Committees to form a Resources Committee; and the expansion of the Audit & Risk Management Committee to an Audit, Risk & Governance Committee. He also proposed that, given the significant outcomes/outputs of these 3 main Standing Committees, it would be appropriate to revisit the membership of the Committees.

Members noted that the Remuneration Committee and Equality & Diversity Forum, along with Appointments and Evaluation Panels would continue to operate as and when required consistent with current arrangements.

Referring to the frequency of Meetings, the Interim Chief Executive outlined the rationale for the proposal that Board Meetings are held every 2 months rather than the current monthly frequency. It was noted that this would not preclude the convening of additional Meetings if the business need arises. The Interim Chief Executive stated that this allows the Corporate Management Team to prepare even more comprehensive and meaningful reports given a longer period between each Committee or Board Meeting.

Members were informed that it is proposed that the Board Meetings become all day events split into 2 distinct sections – one session to be the formal Business of Agenda Items and one session to be either Board training and/or an organisation focused session.

The Interim Chief Executive commented on the numerous discussions relating to the learning and development which Members feel that they need to fully discharge their responsibilities and suggested that an up-to-date Training Needs Analysis be undertaken across all aspects of the Board's activities, following which a programme for Board Members' training would be developed.

The Interim Chief Executive assured Members that the proposals presented were about improving and moving the Organisation forward and sought Members' comments.

The Chairman informed Members that if the Board were to adopt the revised Committee Structure, NIFRS Standing Orders and other key documents would require to be reviewed and updated to reflect the new Committee and Meeting structures. He also explained to Members that he would be circulating a questionnaire for Members to complete seeking their views as to the Board's effectiveness. He stated that this exercise will form part of the Board's self-assessment.

During discussion, Members indicated their support, in principle, to the proposals and in particular welcomed the expansion of the Audit & Risk Committee to include governance. Mr J Barbour, whilst expressing concern regarding the frequency of Meetings, welcomed the proposed format for Board Meetings given that the training and development needs of Board Members had been previously identified. Mr Hanna suggested the need to consider work plans and terms of reference for the new Committees in order to alleviate/work through any overlaps. He also suggested that given the DID recommendations pertaining to the Board's Committee structures that DHSSPS be informed of the proposals.

The Chairman circulated a proposed membership for each of the 3 main Committees for the consideration of Members and asked Members to forward any comments regarding proposed Committee membership to him.

With respect to the membership of the Committees, Mrs Rice advised caution with regard to any overlap of Members on the Resources Committee and the Audit & Risk Committee as best practice suggests those Members serving on a Finance Committee should not be members of an Audit & Risk Committee.

The Chairman indicated that advice had been sought in respect of the potential overlap of Members on these Committees. The Interim Chief Executive explained that advice had not been prescriptive and, whilst it is recognised as best practice not to have Members serving on both Audit & Risk and Finance Committees, given the depleted membership of the Board currently it will unfortunately be necessary for some Members to serve on both the Resources Committee and the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee. He highlighted that there were no indications of any conflicts/potential conflicts and assured Members that he and the Chairman would closely monitor same.

Referring to the Equality & Diversity Forum, the Chairman stated that he would wish Mrs Rice to remain as Chairman of the Forum. He also proposed that Mrs Rice serve on the Remuneration Committee.

The Chairman also referred to the membership of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee and explained that, with effect from 1 April 2014, the Chief Fire Officer would no longer be an ex-officio Board Member of the Committee, but would be recorded as being “in attendance”.

During further discussion, Mrs Grant suggested that, given the difficulties with quorums, it may be prudent to add another Member to the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee. Members also suggested that the revised Committee Structure be reviewed in September.

- - - - -

At this point,  
Mr J Barbour left the Meeting

- - - - -

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

**Resolved: “to agree, in principle, the revised Committee Structure, subject to the membership of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee being increased to 5, along with the proposed changes to the structure of Board/Committees Meetings effective from 1 April 2014”.**

**It was further agreed that a comprehensive Training Needs Analysis be undertaken for all existing and new Board Members when appointed.**

- - - - -

At this point,  
Mr Carr left the Meeting

- - - - -

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

### **Director of Community Protection**

Members noted the report from the Director of Community Protection. The Interim Chief Fire Officer outlined the salient points from the Report -

- Community Development – external evaluation of Fire Safety Week Campaign was very favourable with 70% of people in NI being exposed to the advertising;
- Emergency Response – work has progressed on the Shirley Towers Project;
- Road Safety – update noted; Members also noted that meetings of the Ministerial Road Safety Forum had been held in the wake of the spate of road deaths;
- Health & Safety - update noted;
- GD92/ICT - updates on progress noted. The Interim Chief Fire Officer reported positively on progress with respect to the Retained Availability Project and Command & Control.

### **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 the year to date variance when comparing actual expenditure with budget for the 9 months ended 31 December 2013 shows an underspend of £653k.

The Director of Finance explained that following detailed discussions at Corporate Management Team level and with budget-holders, an easement of £100k from NIFRS revenue budget had been declared. She assured Members that Finance staff will continue to monitor in detail the projected expenditure for the remainder of the year. The Board will be notified if further easements/pressures are identified as part of this process.

Referring to the Capital budget, the Director of Finance explained detailed discussions with Project Managers, budget-holders and Procurement colleagues have highlighted a projected underspend of £947k. Members acknowledged that the majority of this projected underspend was due to circumstances out of NIFRS control, namely one liquidation of one of our vehicle suppliers. The Director of Finance updated Members on discussions with DHSSPS regarding the Capital position.

During discussion regarding the Capital position, the Director of Finance explained that NIFRS was working on the assumption that the PALS arrangements for NIFRS would be in place in April. The Interim Chief Executive advised the Meeting that this had just been confirmed verbally.

The Director of Finance informed Members that NIFRS had received an indication of its budget allocation for 2014/15 as £73.939m. She stated that the Corporate Management Team having been considering budget pressures and outlined work which would be progressed over the next few weeks.

## **Director of HR**

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources provided a summary of the information presented including:

- Recruitment & Selection – Support Staff update noted. The Director of Human Resources informed Members that there was no appointment made following the interviews for the post of Head of Human Resources Advisory. The post was re-advertised on 14 January. He also informed Members that 3 out of the 4 HR Business Partners had been appointed, the fourth post would be re-advertised;
- Wholetime Firefighter recruitment – 27 Trainees commenced training on 20 January 2014;
- Attendance Management update – overall level of absence has continued to fall;
- Discipline/Grievance/Tribunal Cases – update noted;
- Policy Development update noted.

## **Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs**

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

- Capital Projects - update noted. The Interim Chief Executive reported positively on a recent site visit to the new Omagh Fire Station; Operational Estate Asset Appraisal Survey underway with a completion date of early March 2014;
- Estates – update noted;
- Procurement - update noted;
- Information Management – Project Group to be set up to take this forward;
- Press/Media Coverage – update noted.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

The Chairman thanked the Directors for their Reports. The Chairman and Members also acknowledged and commended the Corporate Management Team on the significant work which is being completed within the individual Directorates.

The Interim Chief Executive expressed his appreciation to his Corporate Management Team colleagues for the significant work which had been achieved and also commended the Team for their work to mitigate the effects of financial pressures.

## **Item 7: Standing Items**

### **Organisational Improvement Committee**

Members noted the draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Organisational Improvement Committee held on 13 December 2013.

The Interim Chief Executive stated that the Organisational Improvement Committee continued to work towards its last meeting before the end of the financial year. He summarised the current position highlighting that 80% of the recommendations had now been completed and closed. Members noted that any outstanding actions/recommendations still live after the year-end would be addressed through the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee.

### **Desertcreat Project**

Members noted a Briefing Note providing an update on the Desertcreat Project incorporating the Programme Risk Register. Members noted that this does not include the security risk which is captured in PSNI Corporate Risk Register, however, the Deputy Chief Constable has offered a specific briefing to NIFRS Board Members on the subject of security at Desertcreat.

**Members agreed that the Deputy Chief Constable be invited to the February Board Meeting to brief Members on the subject of security at Desertcreat.**

### **Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items**

#### **NIFRS Annual Business Plan 2013-14 – Progress Report**

Members noted NIFRS Annual Business Plan Progress Report for Quarter 3 – April to December 2013, along with the Annual Progress Reporting Summary as at December 2013.

The Interim Chief Executive gave Members a brief overview of the documentation commenting that the general direction of travel is positive.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the information presented. Mrs Rice acknowledged the positive progress achieved.

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

**Resolved: “to approve NIFRS Annual Business Plan 2013-14 Progress Report for Quarter 3 – April to December 2013”.**

#### **Draft NIFRS Corporate Business Plan 2014/15**

Members noted the draft NIFRS Corporate Business Plan 2014/15.

The Interim Chief Executive outlined the background to the development of the draft Corporate Business Plan. He explained that the draft Plan would normally be presented to the Service Delivery & Performance Committee but due to timeframes the draft Plan had been presented to the Board.

The Interim Chief Executive explained how and by whom the Business Plan would be monitored and also noted that progress against the Plan will be reported to the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee on a regular basis. He further noted that once the Board moves to 2-monthly Meetings, attendance will include Area Commanders and Heads of Departments as part of the accountability process.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the information presented.

Mr Hanna highlighted the need to include a reference to addressing the interim arrangements within the draft Plan.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mr Hanna, unanimously -

**Resolved: "to approve the draft NIFRS Corporate Business Plan 2014/15 subject to inclusion of a reference to the interim arrangements".**

### **Economic Appraisals**

Members noted the Executive Summaries of the following Economic Appraisals –

- HMRC Costs in respect of Retained Equality Compensation Payments;
- Supply and Installation of Various Floor Coverings at NIFRS Properties;
- Community Safety Advocates; and
- Procurement of Computer Hardware.

The Director of Finance gave Members a brief outline of each of the Economic Appraisals.

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

**Resolved: "to approve the aforementioned Economic Appraisals".**

### **Item 9: Relevant Correspondence**

Members noted the following correspondence –

Letter of appreciation following NIFRS attendance at an incident on 4 December 2013.

### **Item 10: Sealing of Documents**

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Angloco Limited – BA Training Pods;  
Fiat Group Automobiles UK Limited – Crew Cab Vans;  
Capita Managed IT Solutions Limited – Provision of Support and Associated Services for Management Information Systems; and  
3FiveTwo Training Academy – First Aid at Work and First Aid Refresher Course Programme.

### **Item 11: Schedule of Future Meetings**

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

Members also noted that Meetings of the HR and Service Delivery & Performance Committees were scheduled to take place on 11 and 18 February 2014.

The Chairman advised Members that a meeting of the Board Governance Self-Assessment Working Group would be held on 5 February 2014.

### **Review of Internal Audit Function**

The Interim Chief Executive informed Members that the review of the Internal Audit Function was almost complete and referred to discussion with BSO. He explained that the Audit & Risk Management Committee, at a Meeting the next day, would be considering paperwork for the contracting out of the Internal Audit Function.

The Chairman stressed the need to ensure that staff are treated appropriately.

Mr Hanna, as a Member of BSO, declared a potential conflict of interest.

---

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS  
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED  
AT 4.40 PM

---