

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

25 MARCH 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 C Mack

APOLOGIES: Cllr D Barbour
Mr M Kerr
Ald Mrs G Rice

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 C McNally, Head of Corporate Communications
Mr G Hamilton, Assistant Chief Constable, PSNI
Mr D Scott, PSNI
Mr G McMullan, PSNI
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS Observer

At the commencement of the Meeting, the Chairman, on behalf of Members, extended condolences to Mr Milton Kerr on the death of his Mother.

The Chairman informed the Meeting that Mr Gordon Smyth had been appointed to the NIFRS Board with effect from 1 April 2014.

The Chairman referred to the imminent retirement of Group Commander June Fahy from the Regional Control Centre, after 40 years' service and, on behalf of the Board, extended best wishes to June on her retirement.

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 apparent conflicts of interest.

Referring to the Board Governance Self-Assessment exercise and the attendance of Mr P McCartan at the last Board Meeting to observe the conduct of the Meeting, etc, the Chairman informed Members that he had subsequently received a report from Mr McCartan based upon his observations at the Board Meeting on 25 February 2014. A copy of the report was circulated for the information of Members.

The Chairman referred to the Business for today's Meeting and acknowledged Members' time commitment for preparing for the Meeting. He expressed his appreciation to the Board Administrative Secretary and the Chief Executive's Support staff for issuing the paperwork for the Meeting.

The Chairman outlined how he would be conducting the Business for the Meeting.

Item 3: Minutes – 25 February 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 February 2014, 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 C Mack.

Arising from the Minutes:

Interim Governance Arrangements

The Chairman referred to the comments raised at the last Meeting regarding a Strategic Planning Day and explained that the Corporate Management Team were developing a Year Plan incorporating a meeting schedule, work programme and a training programme. He stated that when this was in place an 'Away Day' would be arranged.

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

Audit & Risk Management Committee – Meeting – 19 March 2014

A Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee was held on 19 March 2014.

Mr J Barbour, Member of the Audit & Risk Management Committee, reported on the business discussed at the Meeting which included Internal Audit Reports; NIFRS Risk Register detailing the 7 significant risks which management are currently highlighting; updated NIFRS Fraud Policy & Response Plan; Information Management & Governance Group. He also reported that the Committee had considered a draft NIFRS Assurance Framework outlining the roles and responsibilities of individuals and Committees within NIFRS. He explained that NIFRS Corporate Risk Management Strategy and Policy had been revised to support the Assurance Framework and assist in the identification and recording of risk. The Committee had recommended approval of the documents.

Human Resources Committee – Meeting – 19 March 2014

A Meeting of the Human Resources Committee was held on 19 March 2014. Mr Hanna, Chairman of the Committee, reported positively on the last Meeting of the Committee and gave an overview of the key items of Business discussed including –

- Retained Availability update;
- Structural review of HR update;
- Organisational change – update on progress with respect to Directorate realignments and associated policies;
- NIFRS Discipline Policy & Procedure proposed changes;
- Rank to Role Legacy Issues – Watch Commander 'B'.

Mr Hanna extended his best wishes to the new Resources Committee.

Arising out of the Meeting:

Draft NIFRS Discretions Policy

Members were informed that the Committee had considered the draft NIFRS Policy Statement on Employer's Discretions within the Local Government Pension Scheme Regulations and recommended approval of the draft Policy Statement.

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

Resolved: “to approve the draft NIFRS Discretions Policy”.

Remuneration Committee – Minutes – 25 February 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 25 February 2014, 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 Hanna, seconded by Mrs Grant.

Service Delivery & Performance Committee – Meeting – 25 March 2014

Members noted that a Meeting of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee had been held that morning prior to the Board Meeting. Mr J Barbour, who had chaired the Meeting, reported on the Business discussed as follows:

- Operational Safety Issues – the Interim Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the ongoing accident investigation, including a detailed report from the Operational Improvement Steering Group (OISG) in respect of issues referred by the Accident Investigation Team following the death of Firefighter N Hamilton;
- IRMP Progress Update – the Committee commended the Interim Chief Fire Officer's approach to IRMP;
- Fire Safety Update – ACFO Ashford reported further on Fire Safety initiatives particularly in relation to apprenticeships;
- Health & Safety Update – revised NIFRS Health & Safety Policy Statement and Guide approved by the Committee;

- ICT Update including progress with respect to GD92, Command & Control, WAN and Retained availability;
- Operational Support Services and Training & Organisational Development Updates.

The Chairman expressed his appreciation to Mr J Barbour for chairing the Service Delivery & Performance Committee Meeting.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer referred to the work of OISG and provided a detailed overview and update in relation to the issue pertaining to BA refreshers.

During discussion, Members asked the Interim Chief Fire Officer to ensure that the issues relating to BA Refresher training referred to OISG from the Accident Investigation Team are recorded in NIFRS Corporate Risk Register.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer also pointed out the need to continue to raise concerns regarding the impact of procurement processes on safety critical matters, such as specialist training, at Accountability Meetings.

Item 5: Chairman's Business

The Chairman reported briefly on his activities since the last Meeting of the Board.

Long Gallery Event – 29 April 2014

The Chairman updated Members on progress with regard to arrangements for the Long Gallery event. He explained that the theme for the event would be NIFRS IRMP incorporating the Prevention & Protection Strategy. He stated it would be an opportunity for NIFRS to demonstrate to MLAs how it delivers its service within their areas.

April Board Meeting

Members were informed that the April Board Meeting would be held at Castle Buildings.

Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool

The Chairman referred to the report from Mr McCartan following his attendance at the February Board Meeting and provided a synopsis of the key points relating to chairmanship, Board papers, Board Agenda, frequency of Board Meetings and relationships between the Chair and the Chief Executive.

Members noted the draft Board Governance Self-Assessment submission. The Chairman outlined the process undertaken by the Working Group in developing the submission.

Following discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mrs Grant, seconded by Mr Carr, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve NIFRS Board Governance Self-Assessment submission subject to amendments”.

Members asked that correspondence be forwarded to the Public Safety Unit highlighting the Board's approach to the exercise.

The Chairman commented positively on the self-assessment exercise and expressed his appreciation to the Working Group for all their work.

Item 6: Chief Executive's Business Directors' Updates

The Interim Chief Fire Officer referred Members to the Directorate realignments effective from 1 April 2014 and outlined briefly the high level changes. He noted that the Corporate Management Team would be communicating the changes to all staff.

Director of Operations

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operations and also the Fire Brigades' Union Fatal Accident Investigation into the major incident at Warwickshire – Summary Report.

Mr Hanna referred to criticisms within the Report regarding the IRMP process and questioned how NIFRS could ensure IRMP process is correct. The Interim Chief Fire Officer outlined NIFRS approach to integrated risk management planning and assured Members that NIFRS applied a risk-based approach to IRMP.

The Chairman commented on the objectivity and professionalism of the Report and it was agreed that a letter be forwarded to Mr M Wrack, General Secretary, FBU, thanking him for the objective and professional report.

Referring to the Emergent Issues within this Report, the Interim Chief Fire Officer highlighted that he had introduced additional control measures to address staff workloads and the risk of not achieving IRMP/corporate objectives which included the temporary redeployment of an Area Commander to act as the NIFRS IRMP Programme Manager; temporary redeployment of a Station Commander to deliver the Operational Test of Competence (OTOC) process; and the temporary redeployment of 3 operational personnel with risk management experience to support IRMP task teams.

Director of Operational Support

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operational Support.

Director of Community Protection

Members noted the Report from the Director of Community Protection.

Director of Finance

Members noted the Report from the Director of Finance. The Director of Finance drew Members' attention to the Revenue financial performance for the 11 months ended 28 February 2014 which shows an underspend of £149k. She explained, however, that due to a potential accrual relating to corporation tax liability and a change in accounting treatment of the accrual for an employment legal case will result in a corresponding reduction in NIFRS budget and therefore an effective projected break-even Revenue financial position at 31 March 2014 was anticipated.

With respect to Capital financial performance, the Director of Finance informed Members that for the period ending 28 February 2014 were indicating a service-wide underspend of £392k. Referring to the projected year-end outturn, the Director of Finance explained that detailed discussions have taken place during early March with project managers/budget-holders and procurement colleagues following which the revised projected underspend is £748k. Members noted the details of the projects impacting on the underspend. The Director of Finance stressed the need to continue to progress these projects to ensure the majority of the expenditure is at the beginning of the new financial year.

The Chairman expressed his frustration regarding NIFRS budget position and the process for allocating its budget and working through the relevant procurement processes. Whilst acknowledging the constraints under which NIFRS operates, he stressed the need to ensure NIFRS does all in its power to spend its budget allocation.

Director of HR

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources summarised the key points including:

- Recruitment & Selection – The Director of Human Resources updated Members with respect to the recruitment of HR roles;
- Attendance Management update – overall level of absence has been on a downward trend;
- Discipline/Grievance/Tribunal Cases – update noted; with respect to suspensions, the Director of Human Resources explained that he would be conducting a review of the management of suspensions;
- Policy Development update particularly in relation to NIFRS Discipline Policy and Wholetime Recruitment Review.

Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs

Members noted the Report from the Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs. The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs reported on the key points:

- Capital Projects - updates noted regarding Logistics Support Centre (One-Stop-Shop) and the new Omagh Fire Station. The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs stated that is hoped to officially open the Station in September;

- Operational Estate Asset Appraisal Survey largely completed with final reports to be provided and data migration in to the Estate Manager software system to be finalised. She explained that the information collated is showing that there is much work to be done to improve the quality and function of NIFRS Estate;
- Comprehensive review of Estates function underway – an initial report has raised a number of concerns which are currently being investigated and managed.

The Chairman referred to the update on Projects which Estates are currently working on and reiterated the Board's concerns and frustrations in regard to projects not being progressed and the resultant impact on NIFRS expenditure.

Mr J Barbour referred to the budget shortfall and the lack of ability to spend and emphasised the need for accountability and responsibility with regard to this matter.

The Interim Director of Planning & Corporate Affairs noted Members' comments and assured Members that steps and actions are being taken to address matters within Estates. She accepted that the matter was a difficult one which would take a period of time to resolve.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer, in the absence of the Interim Chief Executive, provided further assurance that the issue was being actively addressed and added that the Board was being kept up-to-date regarding any emergent issues/progress.

Discussion took place in relation to NIFRS procurement processes including timeframes associated with Business Case development, etc.

CHANGE IN THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

It was agreed that Item 9: Strategic Standalone Items – Economic Appraisals, be taken as the next Item of Business.

Item 9: Strategic Standalone Items Economic Appraisals

Provision of Pension Software

Members noted the Executive Summary of the Economic Appraisal for the provision of Pension Software. The Director of Finance gave an overview of the Executive Summary.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Economic Appraisal for the provision of Pension Software”.

Provision of Support for Sophtlogic

Members noted the Executive Summary of the Economic Appraisal for the provision of Support for Sophtlogic. The Director of Finance gave an overview of the Executive Summary.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Economic Appraisal for the provision of Support for Sophtlogic”.

At this point,
Messrs G Hamilton, D Scott and G McMullan joined the Meeting

**Item 8: Standing Items
Desertcreat Project**

Members noted a Briefing Note providing an update on the Desertcreat Project incorporating the Programme Update.

The Chairman welcomed Assistant Chief Constable Hamilton and his colleagues to the Meeting.

Assistant Chief Constable Hamilton gave Members a security briefing with respect to NI Community Safety College at Desertcreat.

Assistant Chief Constable Hamilton and his colleagues answered Members' questions regarding various aspects of the information presentation.

The Chairman thanked Messrs Hamilton, Scott and McMullan for their presentation.

At this point,
Messrs G Hamilton, D Scott and G McMullan left the Meeting

**Item 9: Strategic Standalone Items
Pension Issues**

Widow's Pension Entitlement

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to a Widow's Pension Entitlement. The Director of Finance outlined the background to the Pension issue.

During discussion, Members asked that the legal advice be circulated to the Board for information. In order to make a final determination, Members also requested further information regarding the matter. In the meantime, Members suggested that consideration be given to making an interim payment. The Director of Finance explained that any proposed interim payment would be subject to positive approval from DHSSPS.

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

Resolved: “to approve an interim payment, without prejudice, subject to DHSSPS approval”.

Members requested that correspondence be forwarded to the individual concerned outlining the current position.

Interim Survivors’ Payments

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to Interim Survivors’ Payments. The Director of Finance provided an overview of the Briefing Note.

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

Resolved: “to approve Option 2”.

Death Grant Issue

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to a Death Grant Nomination. The Director of Finance outlined the background to the Paper.

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

Resolved: “to approve Option 1”.

Unpaid Absence Pension Contributions

Members noted a Briefing Paper pertaining to Unpaid Absence Pension Contributions. The Director of Finance and the Director of Human Resources outlined the background and the considerations with regard to the matter.

Following discussion, it was agreed to defer a decision pending legal advice being sought and the provision of further information.

NIFRS Loss Register

Members noted the 2013/14 Year to Date Loss Register.

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

Resolved: “to approve the application to write-off of the fuel provided free of charge by NIFRS to SOS Bus Charity the Fire Emergency Support Service (FESS) vehicles”.

The Chairman referred to the unapproved bonuses/Directors’ pay matters and asked that the Director of Finance ensure due processes had been completed in respect of these matters.

Item 10: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 11: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Konica Minolta Business Solutions (UK) Limited – Purchase of Photocopiers and Printers.

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 4.30 PM
