

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

29 APRIL 2014

1.00 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 M Kerr
Mr A Hanna
Mr C Mack
Mr G Smyth

APOLOGIES: Ald Mrs G Rice

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, Performance & Governance
Mrs C McNally, Head of Corporate Communications
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS Observer

The Chairman welcomed Mr Gordon Smyth to his first Board Meeting following his appointment on 1 April 2014.

Following a request from the Chairman, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford provided Members with an overview of NIFRS arrangements for the Giro d'Italia Road Race.

The Chairman noted that prior to the Meeting, a debrief had taken place with respect to that morning's Engagement Event in the Long Gallery. He stated feedback on the event had been positive and he thanked executive colleagues for the effort that had gone into the obvious success of the event.

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.

Item 3: Minutes – 25 March 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 March 2014, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, subject to a minor amendment, on the motion of Mr Mack, seconded by Mr Carr.

Arising from the Minutes:

Pension Issues

Widow's Pension Entitlement

The Director of Finance updated Members on the current position with respect to the pension issues relating to a widow's pension entitlement. She explained that, as agreed by the Board at its last Meeting, at which the Pension Paper on the Widow's Pension Entitlement was presented, approval was sought from DHSSPS to make an interim payment to the individual. She informed Members that DHSSPS and DFP had approved the interim payment and a payment would be made on 1 May.

The Director of Finance reminded Members of the legal advice received regarding this matter. She confirmed that no further information had come to light since the last Board Meeting from the search of the archives.

The Director of Finance also advised that further approval would be required from DHSSPS and DFP for any further payments.

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

Resolved: “to pay the Widow's pension entitlement under the terms of the NILGOSC Scheme without delay based on the legal advice received on the matter”.

Unpaid Absence

The Director of Finance updated Members on the current position with regard to legal advice on this matter. She reminded Members of the background to the matter and also of the recommended way forward.

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

Audit & Risk Management Committee – Minutes – 19 March 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit & Risk Management Committee held on 19 March 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 Smyth, seconded by Mr Mack.

Human Resources Committee – Minutes – 19 March 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Human Resources Committee held on 19 March 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 J Barbour, seconded by Mr Kerr.

Service Delivery & Performance Committee – Minutes – 25 March 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Delivery & Performance Committee held on 25 March 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 Smyth, seconded by Mrs Grant.

Item 5: Chairman's Business

The Chairman reported on his activities since the last Meeting of the Board. He noted in particular his participation on the Judging Panel for the Inaugural Joint Training Awards and commended those NIFRS personnel involved in the process. It was also noted that the Inaugural Joint Training Awards Ceremony would take place on 30 April 2014.

NIFRS Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Members noted an analysis of the responses to each of the questions contained in the Board Self-Assessment Questionnaire.

The Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance highlighted that there is generally a large degree of consensus on the Board's performance. She explained that areas for improvement and/or training should now be highlighted and added that going forward the analysis would form part of the Board's Training Needs Analysis.

National Joint Council Matters

Members noted that a meeting of the National Joint Council was scheduled to take place on 4 June 2014.

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 drew Members' attention to the Operational Risk Analysis update with regard to formal consultation with the Fire Brigades' Union on the Operational Efficiencies Plan and informed Members that consultation on the Plan had concluded successfully. He advised the Meeting that the agreed principles would be implemented with effect from 1 May 2014.

The Chairman noted that year-end accountability meetings had been held between the Director of Operations and the Assistant Chief Fire Officers and territorial Area Commanders. The Interim Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the accountability meetings and assured Members that any assurance issues were being addressed.

The Chairman noted and welcomed the progress with respect to BA Refresher training.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions regarding the HSENI investigation into the death of Firefighter N Hamilton and the Integrated Risk Management Planning process.

Director of Operational Support

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operational Support.

Referring to the Transport & Engineering Services and the update on capital purchasing, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen highlighted that with respect to the projects for the supply of landrovers and cars, these projects were complete and the vehicles allocated.

The Chairman enquired as to whether post project evaluations (PPE) would be completed in the future in respect of these projects. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen acknowledged that PPEs were an essential aspect of a project and explained that Transport & Engineering Services had programmed a series of evaluations for each project.

The Chairman referred to the contract for WRLs and sought an update on progress following the award of the contract to a new supplier due to the original supplier going into administration. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen explained that the chassis, bodies and fire engineering had all been delivered and the WRLs were in the final stages of construction. Members noted that final delivery is expected in June.

Mr J Barbour raised ongoing concerns with regard to operational training, particularly in relation to the numbers of personnel yet to receive Compartment Fire Fighting Training (CFFT) and the procurement of Specialist Training such as Incident Command as NIFRS does not currently have access to such external training. He also expressed concern with respect to the procurement of end of life vehicles, essential for RTC training, which was still unresolved.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer acknowledged the backlog in CFFT and assured Members that an appropriate action plan had been put in place to resolve the issue. He explained that this training was provided at interim facilities and it was a credit that personnel continued to deliver the courses.

Mr J Barbour expressed his concern regarding the timeline for addressing the backlog and stressed that the training facilities were not acceptable. He stressed the need to alert DHSSPS of the risks especially given the potential timeframe for Desertcreat.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer explained that the Director of Human Resources and the Area Commander (Training & Organisational Development) were considering other options to see if the timeframe for addressing the backlog can be reduced. He also reminded Members of the procurement difficulties which had impacted on NIFRS' ability to avail of external training for personnel.

The Director of Finance updated Members on the current position in relation to the procurement of Specialist Operational Training explaining that work is well underway to draft a detailed specification document to enable a procurement process to be initiated. She further explained that, given the timeframe for the procurement process, NIFRS will be seeking DHSSPS approval for a Single Tender Action (STA) to enable NIFRS to avail of Specialist Training in the current year.

During further discussion, the Interim Chief Executive commented that the Corporate Management Team shared Members' concerns and stated that dialogue will take place with DHSSPS for the approval of a STA. He explained, however, that given the gaps in procurement and the need for critical training, a decision may be necessary which could result in normal processes having to be worked round.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen answered Members' questions regarding other aspects of his Report.

Director of Community Protection

Members noted the Report from the Director of Community Protection.

Referring to Members' concerns regarding the procurement of end of life vehicles, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford explained that this was also an issue for Community Development as the sourcing of these vehicles was causing difficulties in the delivery of Road Safety events.

Director of HR

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources.

The Director of Human Resources drew Members' attention to the Attendance Management Update noting that the overall level of absence has fallen significantly with a number of staff groups meeting the target. He explained that the downward trend has produced a year-end outturn for 2013/14 of 10.4 shifts lost per person as compared to 11.5 for last financial year.

The Chairman referred to the update relating to the high level Directorate realignment and welcomed the progressed attained.

Director of Planning, Performance & Governance

Members noted the Report from the Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance.

The Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance updated Members on progress with respect to the Logistics Support Centre. She informed Members that NIFRS has been allocated £400k for this project in 2014/15 and explained that NIFRS must start the project in 2014/15 to create a commitment. She further explained that to enable NIFRS to progress the project in the current financial year it is imperative that the Business Case is submitted to DHSSPS in early June 2014. In order to meet this timeframe, the Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance sought the Board's approval to release the Business Case before the next Board Meeting assuming it is within budget of the SOC.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Kerr, seconded by Mrs Grant, unanimously approved the release of the full Business Case for the Logistics Support Centre to DHSSPS assuming it is within budget of the SOC (£8.4m).

The Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance noted that the construction works are now complete on the new Omagh Community Fire Station and suggested that the Board consider holding their June Board Meeting at the new Station.

Members agreed to hold the Board Meeting on 24 June 2014 at Omagh Community Fire Station.

With respect to Estates, the Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance noted there is a current focus on Estates-related planned maintenance, reactive maintenance and statutory issues to ensure the requirements of NIFRS are met.

Members noted that NIFRS Corporate Business Plan 2014/15 had received DHSSPS approval.

The Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance updated Members on the work of the Organisational Improvement Committee and progress in respect of the Combined External Recommendations Action Plan. She highlighted that 97% of the 130 recommendations and 93% of the actions have been addressed and closed. She explained that one further meeting of this Committee was scheduled following which the Committee would be stood down with all remaining recommendations/actions being monitored by the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee.

Director of Finance

Members noted the Report from the Director of Finance. The Director of Finance noted NIFRS 2014/15 Capital Budget position and explained that NIFRS have already entered into £2.17m capital commitments and the Corporate Management Team are currently considering revised priorities for the balance of the £4.83m allocation and also prioritising remaining bids, should extra funds become available through the June Monitoring Round.

The Chairman expressed concern regarding the level of underspend in capital and stressed the need for the Corporate Management Team to commit to commencing 2014/15 projects immediately.

Item 8: Standing Items

Desertcreat Project

Members noted a Briefing Note providing an update on the Desertcreat Project incorporating the Programme Update. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford gave a brief overview of the information presented.

During discussion regarding the Desertcreat project, the Interim Chief Executive explained that the current position afforded each of the 3 Services involved the opportunity to revisit the project and their requirements. He stated that NIFRS have a statutory duty to train and acknowledged the need for NIFRS to invest in a sustainable future, however, there were short to medium terms issues to be addressed.

Item 9: Strategic Standalone Items

Board Governance Review

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to a Board Governance Review which incorporated draft Terms of Reference for each of the Board's Committees and a provisional Meeting and Training Schedule for the Board and its Committees. The Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance outlined the governance process.

The Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance referred to the draft Terms of Reference for the Board's Committees and explained that it is proposed that these Terms of Reference remain in draft to allow for testing in the current year and review in March 2015. She further explained that meetings will be set-up between the Chairs of each of the Committees and the relevant Director to discuss the Terms of Reference and also to determine Committee Work Plans for 2014/15.

NIFRS Loss Register

Members noted NIFRS Loss Register for the year ended 31 March 2014.

The Director of Finance explained that the document had been circulated for information and would be published in NIFRS Annual Report.

NIFRS Corporate Business Plan 2013/14

Members noted a report outlining NIFRS Corporate Business Plan 2013/14 Year-End Position, along with an Annual Progress Reporting Summary as at March 2014.

The Interim Director of Planning, Performance & Governance highlighted that 75% of the tasks commenced during 13/14 were completed. She also highlighted that the Corporate Management Team had carried out a mid-year review of their 13/14 priorities within each of their Directorates taking account of the recommendations from external reviews, etc, and as a result of this review the total number of tasks to be completed during 13/14 increased.

Members noted that the remaining tasks will be carried forward for completion during 14/15 and monitored accordingly.

The Interim Chief Executive commended the organisation on what has been achieved especially given the diversions experienced by NIFRS during the year.

At this point,
Mr Hanna joined the Meeting

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

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

Resolved: “to approve NIFRS Corporate Business Plan 2013/14 Year-End Position”.

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 –

Belfast International Airport – Renewal of Lease for CFFT Training Site.

Item 12: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 2.55 PM
