

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

24 JUNE 2014

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
Mr C Mack
Mr G Smyth

APOLOGIES: Mrs S Grant
Mr M Kerr
Mr A Hanna
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 L Cuddy, Director of Planning, Performance & Governance
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Finance
Mr D Moore, Director of Human Resources
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 apparent conflicts of interest.

Item 3: Minutes – 29 April 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 April 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 J Barbour.

Arising from the Minutes:

Pension Issues

Widow's Pension Entitlement

The Director of Finance noted that this matter had been concluded.

Unpaid Absence

The Director of Finance informed Members that legal advice on this matter had just been received and explained that a report would be presented to the Resources Committee in due course.

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

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 27 May 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee held on 27 May 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 Mack, seconded by Dr McKee.

A Chairperson's Report, providing a synopsis of the Business discussed at the Meeting, was circulated for the information of Members.

The Interim Chief Executive referred to the Chief Executive's year-end Governance Statement and updated Members on the current position noting that the Governance Statement had been reviewed by DHSSPS and the External Auditors. He also referred to the current position with respect to the Organisational Improvement Committee noting that the Committee is of the view that it is the right time for it to end this specific piece of work. He explained that the outstanding recommendations/actions have been handed over to the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee for monitoring.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 18 June 2014

A Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, to consider the draft Annual Report and Statement of Accounts 2013/14, was held on 18 June 2014. Members noted a Chairperson's Report providing an overview of the Business discussed at the Meeting.

The Director of Finance advised Members of the current position with respect to the draft Annual Report explaining that there may be minor amendments as the External Auditors were still reviewing the Report.

Arising from the Meeting:

Draft Annual Report & Statement of Accounts 2013/14

Members noted the draft Annual Report & Statement of Accounts 2013/14 and that these had been reviewed by the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee at its Meeting on 18 June 2014.

Members noted draft Financial Statements and the Director of Finance explained the make-up of the Accounts. She informed Members that the External Auditors have completed their audit and have issued their draft Report To Those Charged With Governance (RTTCWG). She explained that the External Auditors are recommending a qualification to the Accounts. She pointed out that with respect to the operational side of the Accounts there were no significant issues identified in respect of the quality, effectiveness and transparency of financial reporting and accounting.

The Director of Finance explained that the qualification issue related to the assumptions made with regard to pension disclosures, particularly with regard to the timeliness of the demographic assumptions. She stated that the potential qualification to the Accounts had been discussed at length during the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Meeting and that NIFRS is working with GAD and the External Auditors regarding the potential qualification. The Director of Finance updated Members on the current position noting that discussions were ongoing in an effort to resolve the matter.

Referring to the timeframe for the approving the Accounts, the Director of Finance suggested that Members consider delegating authority to the Officers to continue discussions with the External Auditors and GAD to try and resolve the situation. She also suggested that Members delegate authority to the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and the Interim Chief Executive to approve the Annual Accounts, on behalf of the Board, whether qualified or unqualified.

Members gave approval for the Officers to continue to hold discussions with the External Auditors and GAD to try and resolve the matter of the qualification on the Annual Accounts.

Following discussion, Members delegated authority to the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and the Interim Chief Executive to approve the Annual Accounts, on behalf of the Board, whether qualified or unqualified.

The Director of Finance undertook to update Members on progress.

Members noted that a copy of the final Report To Those Charged With Governance, incorporating Management responses, will be presented at a future Board Meeting.

Service Delivery & Performance Committee – Meeting – 12 June 2014

A Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee was held on 12 June 2014. A Chairperson's Report summarising the business discussed at the Meeting was circulated for the information of Members.

Arising from the Meeting

Draft NIFRS IRMP 2015-2020

The draft NIFRS Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015-2020 was considered in detail by the Board at a Workshop immediately prior to the Board Meeting.

The Chairman thanked the Interim Chief Fire Officer and his staff for all their work and commended the draft IRMP 2015-2020 to the Board.

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

Resolved: “to approve the draft NIFRS Integrated Risk Management Plan 2015-2020”.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer outlined the next steps in the Integrated Risk Management Plan process for the information of Members.

Item 5: Chairman’s Business

National Joint Council Matters

The Chairman gave Members a brief overview of the Business discussed at NJC meetings on 4 and 13 June 2014.

Meeting with DHSSPS and Mr S Torrie

The Chairman reported positively on a meeting with DHSSPS and Mr S Torrie, Head of the Scottish Fire & Rescue Advisory Unit. Mr Torrie is advising DHSSPS on the delivery of services. He noted that the Interim Chief Executive and Interim Chief Fire Officer will be working closely with Mr Torrie and DHSSPS regarding NIFRS direction of travel.

Mr J Barbour enquired as to whether there were terms of reference in respect of Mr Torrie’s role and stated that he felt terms of reference were necessary.

The Interim Chief Executive outlined the current position and noted that discussions were ongoing in relation to the appropriateness and relevance of a framework for the Fire & Rescue Service. He explained that NIFRS had not received any formal documentation regarding Mr Torrie’s role and stated that he would be seeking to clarify the position.

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 reported on the incident on 30 May 2014 at the Everglades Hotel. He noted that NIFRS personnel had been commended on their professionalism, effectiveness and their regard to safety issues.

Director of Operational Support

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operational Support.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen noted that a stock-take at year-end had been conducted and there were no issues reported. He referred Members to the Transport & Engineering Services capital projects and updated Members on progress with respect to the procurement of vans and WRLs noting that the vans had been delivered and 5 WRLs were due to be delivered next week.

Director of Community Protection

Members noted the Report from the Director of Community Protection.

The Chairman welcomed the introduction of the Volunteer Pilot Project in the Lisburn District and enquired as to whether there had been any media interest. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford reported on the PR opportunities which had presented locally.

Referring to the Pilot, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford explained that it is envisaged that the Scheme will be rolled out across Northern Ireland with each District having a volunteer resource managed by Community Safety advocates.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford provided clarification regarding changes to the Civil Contingency landscape in Northern Ireland with the introduction of "Community Planning" in the new Council structures.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that the torch from the World Police & Fire Games Special Olympics Torch Run had been presented to NIFRS by Assistant Chief Constable W Kerr. The Torch will be on permanent display at Omagh Community Fire Station & District Headquarters.

Director of Finance

Members noted the Report from the Director of Finance.

The Chairman noted and welcomed the review of impending Procurement exercises. The Director of Finance explained that a provisional list of 2014/15 formal procurement processes had been considered and prioritised by the Corporate Management Team. She noted that the updated lists will continue to be monitored and prioritised by the Corporate Management Team as the financial year progresses. She informed Members that the results of the review are indicating a substantial number of procurement processes will be required to ensure corporate objectives are met in 2014/15 and consideration may have to be given to additional resources within the Procurement Unit.

The Director of Finance explained that NIFRS had not, as yet, received formal notification of its revenue budget allocation for 2014/15. During discussion, the Director of Finance assured Members that the budget position is monitored closely with Finance staff meeting with budget holders on a regular basis. She also explained that NIFRS have proposals should the funding allocation change.

Mr J Barbour noted the level of expenditure in respect of overtime and sought an update on the current position in relation to overtime expenditure and the need to reduce same by 50%. The Director of Finance referred to the timeframe for the implementation of the Efficiency Plans and the delay in implementing the coping mechanisms. However, she was hopeful that there will be movement by the end of June.

With respect to the post of IT Manager, the Director of Finance informed Members of the current position explaining that the post will be re-advertised.

Director of HR

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources.

Referring to the Attendance Management Update, the Chairman noted that the overall level of absence had increased and expressed his disappointment.

In relation to the Discipline and Grievance Update, the Chairman advised Members that he was content with regard to the current position having received assurances from the Director of Human Resources that cases are being progressed.

The Chairman noted the various key issues impacting on Training and Organisational Development and stressed the need to monitor the Desertcreat project and to ensure that existing staff have a training resource which is fit for purpose.

The Director of Human Resources updated Members in particular with regard to BA training; CFFT; end of life vehicles; resourcing and ICT matters. He assured Members that there is progress, however, it will take time to address the issues impacting on Training & Organisational Development.

During discussion the Officers answered Members' questions and provided clarification in relation to the issues to be addressed with respect to training and development within NIFRS.

Service Level Agreement with HSC Leadership Centre

Members noted a Briefing Note relating to a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with HSC Leadership Centre. The Director of Human Resources provided an overview of the Agreement relating to the provision of management and organisation development related services.

Following discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mr Smyth, seconded by Mr J Barbour, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the Service Level Agreement between HSC Leadership Centre and NIFRS for the provision of management and organisation development related services”.

Director of Planning, Performance & Governance

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

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance drew Members' attention to the Operational Asset Appraisal Survey and updated Members on the current position and noting the likely level of investment required to bring the estate to an acceptable standard of condition and compliance.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance answered Members' questions in relation to the Survey and outlined work now being progressed by Estates in response to the Survey findings.

Item 7: Standing Items

Desertcreat Project

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford reported on the current position with respect to the Desertcreat project particularly with regard to the ongoing procurement process which includes the option to seek tenders from shortlisted companies on a price-only basis, a predetermined option available when the Preferred Bidder process is not successfully concluded. He reported on a comprehensive stock take of the current situation being carried out by the Programme Team.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford also explained that the Design Team had been tasked with identifying/securing additional funding for the project.

Mr J Barbour referred to the viability of the project and highlighted the level of expenditure already incurred in respect of the project and informed the Meeting that the Fire Brigades' Union no longer had any confidence in the project. He noted that the FBU will be raising the matter formally in due course.

Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items

Scale of Charges

Members note a revised Scale of Charges 2014/15. The Director of Finance explained that this is a routine annual adjustment of NIFRS charging schedule to take account of inflation.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford suggested the need to revisit the charges relating to Fire Reports. The Director of Finance and Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford to discuss further.

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

Resolved: “to approve the revised Scale of Charges 2014/15”.

Business Case – NIFRS Logistics Support Centre

Members noted the NIFRS Logistics Support Centre Business Case Executive Summary.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Smyth, seconded by Mr D Barbour, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for NIFRS Logistics Support Centre”.

Additional Item of Business

Members agreed to take an additional Item of Business – Replacement Command & Control Mobilising System.

Replacement Command & Control Mobilising System

The Director of Finance advised Members of the current position with respect to the Outline Business Case for a Replacement Command & Control Mobilising System. She stated that NIFRS has currently allocated £300k for this project in 14/15, £1,980k 15/16 and £320k 16/17 and explained that it is critical that this project is committed to in-year given the time required to deliver the project particularly in respect of statutory duty. She asked the Board to approve the release of the Outline Business Case to DHSSPS in June 2014 (before the next Board Meeting) assuming it is within budget of the SOC (£2.6m for Command & Control plus £650k for ICCS – Integrated Communications Control System).

The Director of Finance gave Members a brief overview of the preferred options and the potential timeframes to progress the project.

The Board approved the release of the Outline Business Case to DHSSPS providing it is within budget of the SOC (£2.6m for Command & Control plus £650k for ICCS – Integrated Communications Control System).

Introduction of Modified Pension Scheme

Members noted a Briefing Note relating to the introduction of a new Modified Pension Scheme.

A new Modified Pension Scheme for individuals who were employed as Retained Firefighters for all or part of the period 1 July 2000 to 5 April 2006 inclusive is due to be introduced by legislation on 1 April 2015.

Item 9: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 10: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Motorola Solutions UK Limited – Maintenance and Support Agreement for NIFRS ProCAD System;

Sophtlogic Limited – Provision of Support & Associated Services for NIFRS Management Information Systems;

Respirex International Limited – Re-Lifing of Powered Respirator Suites; and

Arqiva Limited – GD92 Communication and Mobilising System Support Service.

Item 11: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted that the next Board Meeting was scheduled to take place on 26 August 2014.

The Chairman, on behalf the Board, extended best wishes for a peaceful July and August. He also expressed his appreciation to Omagh District for facilitating the Meeting.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 3.00 PM
