

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

28 OCTOBER 2014

2.15 PM

PRESENT: Dr J McKee, Chairman presiding
Cllr D Barbour
Mr J Barbour
Cllr M Carr
Mr A Hanna
Mr K Henning
Mr G Smyth
Mr T Wright

APOLOGIES: Mr C Kerr, Interim Chief Fire Officer
Ald Mrs G Rice

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wallace, Interim Chief Executive
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
Mrs C McNally, Head of Corporate Communications
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS Observer

Item 1: Apologies

Apologies were noted.

The Chairman welcomed newly appointed Board Members Mr K Henning and Mr T Wright to their first Meeting.

The Chairman noted that Mr J Barbour and Mr A Hanna had been re-appointed for a second term and also that his term of office and those of the 3 District Councillor Members – Mrs G Rice, Mr D Barbour and Mr M Carr – had been extended until March 2015. The Chairman updated Members on the ongoing appointments process and explained that the appointment of a District Councillor Member was imminent.

Referring to the Governance & Familiarisation Workshop which had been held immediately prior the Board Meeting, the Chairman reported positively on the Workshop and summarised the key areas of focus which had also included discussion regarding Committee membership, the Head of Service role and the Desertcreat project.

The Chairman stated that the Board had affirmed its commitment to open, honest and transparent working and adherence to the highest principles of public service.

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: Election of Vice-Chairman

The Chairman reminded Members that DHSSPS approval had been given for the Board to appoint a Vice-Chairman. He noted that Mr Hanna had fulfilled the role previously and explained that he proposed Mr Hanna be re-appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Board.

The Board, on the motion of Mr J Barbour, seconded by Mr T Wright, unanimously –

Resolved: “that Mr A Hanna be elected as Vice-Chairman of the NIFRS Board”.

Item 4: Elections to Committees

The Chairman referred to the proposed Committee membership which had been circulated and discussed at the Workshop that morning prior to the Board Meeting. He noted that it had been agreed to defer election of the membership of the Remuneration Committee and the Joint Negotiating Committee pending the review of key governance documents.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that work was underway to review key governance documents such as Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegation and Management Statement & Financial Memorandum. She stated that it was hoped to bring revised documents to the next Board Meeting subject to work with DHSSPS. The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance noted that the Terms of Reference for the Standing Committees were also under review.

The Chairman noted that whilst NIFRS Standing Orders were under review the Board would continue to work to the spirit of the current Standing Orders.

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

Resolved: “that the membership and Chairs of the Committees should be as follows:

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee

**Mr D Barbour;
Mr J Barbour;
Mr M Carr;
Mr G Smyth; and
Elected Representative;**

Chairman - Mr G Smyth;

Resources Committee

**Mr M Carr;
Mr A Hanna;
Mr K Henning;
Mrs G Rice;
Mr G Smyth; and
Mr T Wright;**

Chairman – Mr M Carr;

Service Delivery Committee

**Mr D Barbour;
Mr J Barbour;
Mr K Henning;
Mrs G Rice;
Mr T Wright; and
Elected Representative;**

Chairman – Mr J Barbour;

Equality & Diversity Forum Chair – Mrs G Rice.”

It was agreed that the Committee membership would be reviewed in 6 months.

The Chairman stressed that one of the Board's key priorities would be to ensure the Service operates within its Budget and, well in advance of April 2015, agree strategies, etc, to deal with potential reductions to NIFRS budgets. He stated that he expected the 2015/16 budget to be challenging and stressed the importance of planning ahead.

Referring to the interim senior management arrangements, the Chairman informed Members of a meeting with DHSSPS the following week to progress the Head of Service role. He noted previous discussions regarding the interim arrangements and the senior management structure and explained that he proposed to establish a Working Group to develop proposals for the Head of Service role. He further explained that Terms of Reference for the Group would require to be developed. He emphasised that the Group would not have delegated responsibility and reiterated that their purpose will be to develop proposals for the Board's consideration.

The Chairman proposed that the Working Group consists of the Chairs of the 3 Committees, ie, Mr J Barbour, Mr M Carr and Mr G Smyth, and Mrs G Rice. The Group would be under his chairmanship. Mr D Barbour supported the Chairman's proposal.

The Chairman highlighted that the Board had given a commitment to address the senior management structure and agree a way forward by April 2015. He stressed the need to progress this matter. He added that at next week's meeting with DHSSPS he would be asking DHSSPS to appoint a representative to the Working Group.

Mr Hanna expressed concern regarding the timeframe for progressing the matter given that any proposal will require DHSSP sign-off.

During discussion regarding potential timeframes, Mr Wright noted Mr Hanna's comments and, whilst acknowledging the urgency of agreeing the way forward for the Head of Service role, stressed the importance of the groundwork to assist in the decision-making process associated with this key appointment.

Mr Smyth highlighted the need for the Working Group to meet early in November to progress the matter.

Item 5: Minutes – 30 September 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 September 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 D Barbour.

Arising from the Minutes:

Remuneration Committee – Meeting – 25 September 2014

The Chairman referred to the Pay Remits, reflecting the 1% pay award agreed by the National Joint Council, which had been approved at the September Board Meeting and sought an update on progress.

The Director of Finance updated the Meeting on the current position explaining the Pay Remits had been submitted to DHSSPS and must subsequently be submitted to DFP.

The Chairman indicated that he would be raising the matter at the Accountability Meeting.

Item 6: Chairman's Business

Community Planning – Statutory Partners to be named in Subordinate Legislation

The Chairman informed Members of correspondence received from DoE Local Government Policy Division regarding its engagement with Departments on the implications of the Local Government Act 2014 and, in particular, the forthcoming duty of community planning. He stated that it is the intention that regulations will name statutory partner organisations that will be required to participate in community planning and it has been proposed that NIFRS be included as a statutory partner.

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

Resolved: “that NIFRS should be included as a Community Planning Statutory Partner”.

National Joint Council

The Chairman reported on the business discussed at the NJC Meeting held on 15 October 2014.

Reputational Issues

The Chairman explained his rationale for sharing with Members reputational issues of which, he as Chairman, was aware.

Referring to recent media coverage with regard to the cost of unwanted fire signals and automatic fire alarms (AFA), the Chairman outlined briefly the comments raised and advised Members how such calls were dealt with by other FRSs. He explained that there was no legislation for charging for such calls.

During discussion, Members' concerns regarding the figures published were noted. The Director of Finance explained that the costs were based on an average cost per mobilisation and that this was a very high level calculation and inclusive of all overhead costs associated with the provision of Fire & Rescue Services within Northern Ireland.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen informed Members of NIFRS policies to deal with unwanted fire signals/AFAs and stressed that NIFRS continually works to address same. The Chairman emphasised the need to highlight the positive work by NIFRS to drive down the numbers of these calls.

The Chairman outlined recent comments regarding NIFRS replication of assets and collaborative working with the voluntary sector. He explained to Members that Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford was actively addressing this matter.

The Chairman advised Members of recent remarks regarding replacement Fire Stations and acknowledged that an Estates Survey was currently being considered which would assist in identifying priorities.

The Interim Chief Executive referred to NJC workstreams/initiatives as part of the programme for Fire Service Reform and explained that while there were areas of work which NIFRS would wish to consider or expand, there were areas of work which NIFRS provides as business as usual, eg, youth intervention programmes, water rescue, etc. He referred to transformational funding allocated to FRSs on the mainland and noted that NIFRS are doing the same without any investment.

Item 7: Chief Executive's Business Director of Operations

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operations.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

Director of Operational Support

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operational Support.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the information presented.

Director of Community Protection

Members noted the Report from the Director of Community Development.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

The Chairman noted the impact of budget reductions on RACE and LIFE Schemes with Schemes being cancelled unless there is co-funding from PCSPs and other agencies. He referred to the Volunteer Pilot Programme and enquired whether the programme was at risk due to funding. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen explained that the volunteer programme was cost-neutral.

Director of Finance

Members noted the Report from the Director of Finance.

During discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions regarding the information presented including Retained staff costs, overtime costs and specialist operational training. The Director of Finance explained that December is the key period for the budget and assessing the impact of the efficiencies measures implemented.

The Interim Chief Executive assured Members that the budget position is monitored very closely by the Corporate Management Team.

In response to a question from Mr Smyth, the Director of Finance updated Members on the current position with respect to a potential corporation tax liability.

The Director of Finance advised Members of a High Court Writ received by NIFRS in respect of its Cleaning Contract and explained that NIFRS was awaiting advice on the current position.

Director of HR

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources.

The Chairman referred to the discussion at the Board Workshop regarding succession planning and explained that the recruitment process for the post of Assistant Chief Fire Officer would not be progressed until the senior management structure was agreed.

The Director of Human Resources answered Members' questions relating to the information presented and provided update on training issues. He also updated the Meeting with regard to the structural review of Training & Organisational Development explaining that options will be presented to the Corporate Management Team, and subsequently the Board, to enable improved operational training delivery and mitigate risk.

Director of Planning, Performance & Governance

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

In response to a query from Mr Smyth regarding Assembly Questions and the work involved in responding to same, the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance gave an overview of the categories of questions and the work required to collate responses in short timeframes. She noted the need to start quantifying the time spent in collating such responses and the opportunity costs involved in responding to subsequent queries.

The Chairman referred to the Directors' Reports and explained that he would welcome Members' feedback on the format and content of the Reports.

Item 8: Standing Items

Desertcreat Project

The Chairman noted that the Interim Chief Executive had updated Members on the Desertcreat Project at the Workshop held immediately prior to the Board Meeting.

The Interim Chief Executive reiterated that whether or not the Desertcreat Project proceeds there will still be short to medium term issues relating to the delivery of training which NIFRS needed to address. He noted that these issues have been flagged and are proactively being addressed.

Item 9: Strategic Standalone Items

NIFRS Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure

Members noted the revised NIFRS Whistleblowing Policy & Procedure.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance provided an overview of the revisions to the Policy & Procedure.

The Chairman reaffirmed the Board's commitment to whistleblowing.

Management Guidance on the Use of NIFRS Vehicles

Members noted the Management Guidance on the Use of NIFRS Vehicles.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen noted that the Guidance had previously been circulated to the Audit, Risk & Governance and Resources Committees for consideration and feedback had been incorporated into the document.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen outlined briefly the background to the development of the Guidance and the objectives of same.

During discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions regarding the 'black box' pilot and the livery of NIFRS vehicles.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Management Guidance on the Use of NIFRS Vehicles”.

Economic Appraisals

Members noted the Executive Summaries for the undernoted Business Cases:

- Flood Response PPE and Equipment Project; and
- Retained Attendance/Payroll Module Project.

The Director of Finance referred to the Flood Response PPE and Equipment Project and explained that funding was allocated for this Priority 1 Project, however, the Project will be revisited should circumstances change.

Referring to the Retained Attendance/Payroll Module Project, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen gave Members an overview of the purpose of the Project explaining that it was an add-on to the Retained Availability System.

Mr Carr referred to the Retained Availability System and sought clarification regarding the development of a Report to providing feedback following the implementation of the new System.

The Director of Human Resources explained that work was ongoing with regard to the development of management reports from the system.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Cases for Flood Response PPE and Equipment Project and Retained Attendance/Payroll Module Project.”

Item 10: Relevant Correspondence

Members noted that the following correspondence had been discussed previously under Chairman’s Business:

- Letter from Department of the Environment, Local Government Policy Division – Community Planning – Statutory Partners to be named in Subordinate Legislation.

Item 11: Sealing of Documents

There were no documents for sealing.

Item 12: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.40 PM
