

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

16 DECEMBER 2014

1.30 PM

PRESENT: Dr J McKee, Chairman presiding
Mr C Kerr, Interim Chief Fire Officer
Mr J Barbour
Mr A Hanna
Mr K Henning
Ald Mrs G Rice
Mr G Smyth
Mr T Wright

APOLOGIES: Cllr D Barbour
Cllr M Carr
Cllr A Watson

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 C McNally, Head of Corporate Communications
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS Observer
Mr S Boyd, FBU Observer
Mr D Rooney, FBU Observer

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Chairman informed the Meeting of the appointment of Cllr Adrian Watson to the Board, with effect from 15 December 2014.

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 of Meeting – 28 October 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 October 2014, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Wright, seconded by Mr Henning.

Arising from the Minutes:

Election of Committees

Mr Wright referred to the review of key governance documents and sought clarification as to the timeframe for presenting the revised documents.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that he had hoped that the documents would be presented at today's Meeting but due to the work demands associated with development of the draft budget proposals the matter had been deferred. He further explained that it was anticipated the documents will be presented in February.

The Chairman commented on the necessary focus of the Corporate Management Team on the budget planning scenarios and the resultant impact on workloads.

Minutes of Special Board Meeting – 17 November 2014

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Board held on 17 November 2014, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Hanna, seconded by Mr J Barbour.

Minutes of Additional Board Meeting – 17 November 2014

The Minutes of the Additional Board Meeting held on 17 November 2014, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Henning, seconded by Mr Smyth.

The Chairman informed Members that, as agreed at the Meeting on 17 November 2014, he had forwarded correspondence to DHSSPS sharing the Board's concerns regarding the significant negative impact of the proposed budget reductions. He also reported on a meeting with the Minister.

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

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 19 November 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee held on 19 November 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 Wright.

Mr Smyth, Chairman of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, reported on meetings held with BSO, NIAO, KPMG and members of the Corporate Management Team in preparation for the Committee Meeting.

Mr Smyth provided a brief overview of the business discussed at the Committee Meeting including Internal Audit Reports and in particular the Recommendations Validation Report. He noted that BSO had acknowledged the work achieved in addressing the recommendations and summarised the position as at September 2014.

Referring to the matter of Information Governance, Mr Smyth explained that DHSSPS and BSO had indicated their willingness to assist with this area of work.

Members noted that Mr Smyth will be meeting informally with the Interim Chief Executive to maintain a focus and to review progress.

Resources Committee – Minutes – 2 December 2014

Members noted that the Minutes of the Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 2 December 2014 will be presented to the next Board Meeting.

Item 5: Chairman's Business

Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool 2014/15

The Chairman informed Members that he had received correspondence from DHSSPS regarding the completion of the Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool for 2014/15.

He stated that DHSSPS requires ALB Boards to carry out a Board effectiveness evaluation annually and explained that, as in previous years, a Working Group be appointed to progress the self-assessment. He suggested that Mr Hanna lead the Working Group assisted by Mr Henning and Mr Wright. This was agreed.

Correspondence from Fire Brigades' Union

The Chairman advised Members of correspondence received from Matt Wrack, General Secretary, FBU, regarding the Trade Dispute in relation to Pensions in the Fire Service. He read extracts from the correspondence updating Members on the current position.

Anonymous Correspondence

The Chairman informed Members of DHSSPS concerns regarding anonymous letters relating to sensitive information being shared inappropriately. He reminded Members of the protocol for responding to queries relating to NIFRS.

Item 6: Strategic Standalone Items

Finance Update

Members noted a Finance Update as at 31 October 2014. The Director of Finance reported on the Revenue position noting that NIFRS was underspent by £121k. She provided a brief analysis of the major variances and assured Members that Finance continue to closely monitor expenditure and formally meet with budget-holders on a monthly basis.

The Director of Finance updated Members on progress with respect to Pay Remits noting that 3 of the 6 Pay Remits – Wholetime, Retained and Control staff – have been approved by DHSSPS and DFP. She explained that revised pay rates are currently being applied and it is hoped that the arrears will be paid in December.

The Director of Finance also updated Members on the current position in relation to Corporation Tax.

During discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions and provided clarification regarding aspects of the information presented including, overtime, variable crewing and training.

The Director of Finance outlined the current position with respect to the Capital budget and answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

Budget 2015/16 Planning Scenarios

Members noted NIFRS response to DHSSPS correspondence, dated 7 November 2014, requesting savings proposals in respect of 2015/16 planning scenarios.

A Briefing Note relating to the Budget 2015/16 Planning Scenarios was circulated for the information of Members. The Interim Chief Executive referred to the Board's decision of 17 November 2014 for the Corporate Management Team to develop detailed proposals around Option 4 of the budgetary paper presented to the Board on 17 November 2014. He outlined the DHSSPS response to the Board's decision explaining the DHSSPS requirement that Option 4 was not an acceptable response to the DHSSPS letter of 7 November and that NIFRS was asked to resubmit draft proposals based on one year's saving in 2015/16 of 5%, 10% and 15%.

The Interim Chief Executive referred to the Briefing Note and explained why it was recommended that the Board mandate the Corporate Management Team to continue to develop detailed proposals based around the 5% option as a minimum saving for 2015/16. He emphasised, however, that he was still of the view that the development of a 3-year plan was the more strategic approach for NIFRS.

During a full discussion, the Members indicated their support for the Corporate Management Team to continue to develop detailed proposals based around the 5% option and they continue to work on the Budget Considerations as set down in Appendix 'A' of the response to DHSSPS on 8 December. The Members also noted the risks that this approach presented for the Organisation as outlined previously in the Budget Options presentation on 17 November 2014.

The Director of Finance gave an overview of NIFRS response to the DHSSPS letter of 7 November which provides a summary of NIFRS' position and the potential impacts of the proposed budget reductions. She highlighted that the response had included inescapable pressures. She noted that, as requested by the Board, DHSSPS representatives had received the Budget Options presentation. The Director of Finance pointed out that the NIFRS response had been forwarded to DHSSPS with the caveat that the response had not been considered by the Board. She explained that DHSSPS would need to be advised of the Board's position after the Meeting.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the information presented. Members emphasised the need to stress that NIFRS is a frontline Service and also highlighted the need for the public to be aware of the potential implications especially for public safety and Firefighter safety.

Following further discussion, during which Members reiterated the need for communications/PR strategies to be implemented, the Board, on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Mr Hanna, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the draft proposals in respect of potential 2015/16 budget reductions.”

The Board also confirmed that the Corporate Management Team are to continue to develop detailed proposals based around the 5% option as a minimum saving for 2015/16 and are to continue to work on the Budget Considerations as detailed in NIFRS response to DHSSPS, dated 8 December.

DHSSPS Draft Budget 2015/16 Consultation

Members were informed that the public consultation on the 2015/16 Draft Budget for DHSSPS had commenced. The purpose of the Consultation document is to set out the impact of the draft budget for DHSSPS spending and savings proposals for the 2015-16 year.

Members noted that the public consultation period on the DHSSPS' spending and savings proposals runs in tandem with the public consultation on the Executive's Draft Budget and runs to 29 December 2014.

The Interim Chief Executive advised Members that the Corporate Management Team would be preparing a response and suggested that the Board may wish to respond separately.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the Chairman would submit a response to the Consultation exercise on behalf of the Board.

Pension Issue

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to the payment of a Children's Allowance. The Director of Finance gave an overview of the Pension issue.

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

Resolved: “to approve the payment of the Children's Allowance in respect of 3 children to the Court Funds Office as directed by the Court Order dated 24 October 2014”.

Pay Remit

NIFRS are required to complete Pay Remit pro-formas and supporting Business Cases and submit to DHSSPS and DFP for approval. Members noted the Pay Remit for Administrative Staff which is now due for submission to DHSSPS.

The Director of Finance explained that the Pay Remit reflected the 2.2% pay award agreed by the National Joint Council for Administrative Staff from January 2015 to March 2016 and also included payments of one-off 'Non-Consolidated Amounts' in December 2014 and in April 2015.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Pay Remit for Administrative Staff”.

Business Cases

Provision of Sophtlogic Support and Associated Services

Members noted the Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for the provision of Sophtlogic Support and Associated Services. The Director of Finance explained that Sophtlogic supplied and currently supports key corporate Management Information Systems (MIS) for NIFRS and the provision of contractual support and associated services will address the business-critical need for support of NIFRS Management Information Systems.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the Provision of Sophtlogic Support and Associated Services”.

Replacement of Heavy Rescue Equipment on NIFRS Rescue Attributed Vehicles

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the Replacement of Heavy Rescue Equipment on NIFRS rescue attributed vehicles along with the Strategic Outline Case. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen outlined the proposed project and summarised the benefits to the Organisation in taking the project forward.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Strategic Outline Case and the Business Case for the Replacement of Heavy Rescue Equipment on NIFRS Rescue Attributed Vehicles”.

Replacement of Gas Tight Suits

The Executive Summary in respect of the Business Case for the Replacement of Gas Tight Suits was noted. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Allen provided an overview of the proposed project for replacing this specialist PPE and answered Members’ questions regarding the information presented.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the Replacement of Gas Tight Suits”.

Provision of an Occupational Health Scheme

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the Provision of an Occupational Health Scheme.

The Director of Finance noted that a Business Case for the provision of an Occupational Health Scheme had been previously approved and submitted to DHSSPS in January 2013. She explained that, as per DHSSPS, the Business Case had been resubmitted. Members noted that the revised and updated Business Case now included Health Promotion and Early Intervention.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the Provision of an Occupational Health Scheme”.

Maintenance and Support of Financial Systems

Members noted the Executive Summary Business Case for the Maintenance and Support of Financial Systems. The Director of Finance highlighted the need for the maintenance and support of NIFRS Finance and e-Procurement systems to ensure Business Continuity.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the Maintenance and Support of Financial Systems”.

Report from Ad Hoc Working Group – Appointment of Substantive Head of Service

This Item was deferred to the end of the Meeting.

Item 7: Relevant Correspondence

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

- Letter from DHSSPS – Completion of Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool for 2014/15; and
- Letter from Matt Wrack, General Secretary, FBU – Trade Dispute: Pensions in the Fire Service.

Item 8: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

HIS Global Limited – Authorised Access to an On-Line Publications Library; and
Emergency One (UK) Limited – Supply and Delivery of Water Tender Type ‘B’ Appliances.

Item 9: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

At this point,
all the Officers and Observers, with the exception of the
Board Administrative Secretary, left the Meeting

**Report from Ad Hoc Working Group –
Appointment of Substantive Head of Service**

The Chairman stated that due to the nature of the business to be discussed, this item would be discussed in Closed Session.

During the Closed Session, the Chairman updated Members on the work of the Ad Hoc Working Group for the Appointment of Substantive Head of Service.

At this point,
the Board Administrative Secretary left the Meeting

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.15 PM
