

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

27 JANUARY 2015

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 A Hanna
Mr K Henning
Mr G Smyth
Cllr A Watson
Mr T Wright

APOLOGIES: Ald Mrs G Rice

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wallace, Interim Chief Executive
Mr D Ashford, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Community Protection)
Mr M Graham, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Operational Support)
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Finance
Mr D Moore, Director of Human Resources
Mr D Henderson, T/Corporate Communications Manager
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr J Millar, DHSSPS Observer

Prior to the commencement of Business, the Chairman welcomed newly appointed Board Member Mr A Watson to his first Meeting. He also welcomed Mr D Henderson, Temporary Corporate Communications Manager to the Meeting.

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 – 16 December 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 December 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 Wright.

Arising from the Minutes:

Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool 2014/15

Referring to the Working Group established to take forward the Board Governance Self-Assessment exercise, the Chairman explained that, given the period the assessment covers, it would be more suitable to appoint Mr J Barbour and Mrs Rice in place of Mr Henning and Mr Wright. This was agreed.

The Chairman noted that Mr Hanna would be chairing the Working Group and reminded Members of the process for taking forward the self-assessment exercise.

Budget 2015/16 Planning Scenarios

The Chairman referred to his meeting with the Minister in December regarding NIFRS budget 2015/16. He commented that during the course of considering the Fire Service budget for 2015-16 he had advised of the difficulties for NIFRS in managing significant cuts to the budget in a single year and added that he had clearly indicated that savings of 10% or 15% were not achievable. The Chairman stated that he had been asked if NIFRS could manage a potential cut of 7% and he had given his personal view that it might be possible if the Organisation was pushed into such a position, but that there would be significant impacts to service delivery.

The Chairman explained that on reflection he should not have made such a comment and shared his concerns regarding the pressures the Service was already dealing with and particularly now with respect to Retained availability. He stated that he felt that NIFRS will struggle to deliver even 5% in one year.

The Chairman also referred to his discussion with the Minister regarding whether NIFRS was a frontline Service. He stated that he had pointed out that NIFRS was one of the 3 blue light Services and had highlighted that it was the only Service which relied heavily on part-time personnel and that it was necessary to have equipment and vehicles located in the local community. The Chairman informed Members that he would have to raise the matter of the impact of a 7% reduction again with the Minister.

Discussion took place with regard to the impact of the potential budget cuts during which Members expressed their concerns regarding any potential budget cuts. Mr Henning expressed concern regarding the impact of a 5% cut as this would result in a reduction in establishment subsequently impacting on the capability of NIFRS and resulting in a diminished service to the public. He stressed the need to highlight the significant risk of a 5% reduction which he felt was not manageable in the 2015/16 year due to process and procedural requirements if the Service was required to lose personnel to meet the budget. He stated that he considered option 4 to be the most appropriate way forward. Mr J Barbour concurred with these comments and reiterated the need to highlight the significant risk to Firefighter safety and public safety.

At this point,
Assistant Chief Fire Officer Graham joined the Meeting

The Interim Chief Executive outlined his observations in relation to the discussion and expressed his disquiet that these discussions had not taken place when the Corporate Management Team had presented their budget proposals. He referred to the work of the Corporate Management Team in collating the NIFRS response to the potential budget cuts and noted that these concerns were present at that time. He noted that notification of the budget allocation was imminent and stated that NIFRS had reached a reasonable position in respect of the options presented. He sought clarification as to who decides on issues relating to the budget.

Mr Wright endorsed the work of the Corporate Management Team and acknowledged that the evidence of the impact of the potential budget cuts has been identified and presented to DHSSPS. He stated that whatever the budget allocation there will be challenges for the Board and explained that he felt the Board relies heavily on the advice of the Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team.

Mr D Barbour supported these comments. He stated that the Briefing Paper relating to the budget options had been well prepared and the risks clearly identified with clear evidence. He pointed out the decision regarding the budget allocation was outside of the Board.

During further discussion, Mr Smyth commended the Corporate Management Team for their work on the budget proposals. He noted that, as requested, the Corporate Management Team had fully briefed DHSSPS regarding the implications of the potential budget cuts. He stated that DHSSPS are aware of the consequences of same. The Interim Chief Fire Officer supported the Interim Chief Executive's observations and expressed his view with respect to a potential 5% budget cut and what can and cannot be achieved.

DHSSPS Draft Budget 2015/16 Consultation

Members noted a copy of the Service submission in respect of the DHSSPS draft Budget 2015/16 Consultation.

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

Special Resources Committee – Minutes – 17 November 2014

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 17 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 Smyth, seconded by Mr Carr.

Resources Committee – Minutes – 2 December 2014

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 2 December 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 Henning.

Special Resources Committee – Minutes – 16 December 2014

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 16 December 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 Henning, seconded by Mr Wright.

Item 5: Chairman's Business

National Joint Council Matters

The Chairman informed Members that he would be attending a meeting of the NJC Lead Members that Friday.

Board Membership

The Chairman informed the Meeting that his membership and also that of Mrs Rice and Mr Carr had been extended to 31 August 2015.

Item 6: Chief Executive's Business

Directors' Updates

Director of Operations

The Report from the Director of Operations was noted.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions with regard to an emergent issue relating to the daytime availability of appliances crewed by RDS personnel. He updated Members on the ongoing work of the RDS Working Group and explained that he had initiated an immediate review of existing control measures to ensure suitable and sufficient arrangements are place to address identified gaps in global emergency cover. He noted that the matter would be discussed further later in the Meeting and that a report would also be presented to the Service Delivery Committee.

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. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford updated Members in relation to the review of the Unwanted Fire Signals Policy explaining that it was anticipated that the proposed addendum to the Policy document would be presented to the Service Delivery Committee at its next Meeting. He answered Members' questions regarding aspects of the information presented.

Mr Carr, on behalf of the Board, extended congratulations to ACFO Ashford on being awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal (QFSM) in the New Year's Honours.

Director of Finance

The Report from the Director of Finance was noted. The Director of Finance gave Members a brief overview of the Revenue budget position noting that there was an underspend of £128k as at 31 December 2014 after accounting for the surrender of £580k to DHSSPS in respect of Corporation Tax. She explained that meetings with Budget Holders had taken place throughout January and the Corporate Management Team was currently collating details regarding the budget position. She stated that DHSSPS had indicated that any easements should be submitted as soon as they are identified. The Director of Finance highlighted that any funding surrendered will not impact on next year's budget.

Referring to the Capital budget position, the Director of Finance updated Members on the budget as at 31 December 2014. She expressed concern that a major percentage of the monies is to be spent in the last 3 months of the year, however, discussions with Budget Holders suggest that full spend against the capital allocation is still achievable in year, albeit not necessarily on all projects as currently funded.

The Director of Finance drew Members' attention to the updates on Pension Issues, Information Technology and Procurement. Members noted details of one Single Tender Action (STA) approved in December 2014.

The Director of Finance answered Members' questions relating to the information presented.

At this point,
Mr Hanna joined the Meeting

Director of HR

Members noted the Report from the Director of Human Resources. The Director of Human Resources updated Members in particular with respect to –

- Training Budget - work of the Area Commander (Training & Organisational Development) and his team to enable spend against the Fire Service College contract acknowledged;
- RDS Recruitment Plan – current position with respect to work ongoing to identify potential numbers of retirees, etc, noted;
- Policy Development – Members updated with respect to imminent consultation exercises;
- Wellbeing Survey – current position noted;
- Occupational Health Scheme – Business Case submitted.

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

Director of Planning, Performance & Governance

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance's Report was noted. The Interim Chief Executive highlighted that the Omagh Community Fire Station building was named finalist in the Sustainability Ireland awards for the Sustainability Building Project of the year in September. The Community Station was also named as Commercial Project of the year at the Federation of Master Builders NI Awards 2014 and will be shortlisted for their national awards in London in February.

The Interim Chief Executive also noted the current position with respect to Estates work to improve compliance across all statutory contracts.

In response to a query from the Chairman, the Interim Chief Executive updated the Meeting on the current position with respect to the proposed NIFRS documentary.

Item 7: Strategic Standalone Items

Remuneration Committee

Members were informed that for the purpose of business continuity, they were being asked to elect a Remuneration Committee and noted the current Terms of Reference pertaining to the membership of the Committee.

The Chairman noted that Members of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee should not be Members of the Remuneration Committee. It was further noted that as the Chairmen of the Resources and Services Delivery Committees are also Members of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, the Board is required to elect 3 Members to serve on the Remuneration Committee.

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

Resolved: “that the membership of the Remuneration Committee should be:

**Dr J McKee;
Mr A Hanna;
Mr K Henning; and
Mr T Wright.”**

Review of Operational Contingency Arrangements

Members noted a Briefing Note relating to a Review of Operational Contingency Arrangements to address RDS Availability Issues.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer outlined the background to the Review and noting the issues that had been raised following a presentation to the Corporate Management Team. He gave Members a detailed overview of the emergent issue identified with respect to the lack of availability of RDS personnel during the daytime and in particular the Review findings.

Referring to the recommendations contained within the Briefing Note, the Interim Chief Fire Officer highlighted the need to move to redeploy existing Wholetime resources to establish a Day Duty Crewing System in Enniskillen, Dungannon and Downpatrick Fire Stations.

In the context of operational priorities, the Interim Chief Fire Officer explained the need to move to introduce the first Day Crewing System in Enniskillen Fire Station based on risk and regional/global support for RDS Stations. He further explained that once this pilot process has been evaluated, NIFRS can move to introduce the Day Crewing System into Dungannon and Downpatrick Fire Stations.

During discussion, the Interim Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions regarding the recommendations and information contained within the Briefing Note.

Following further discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mr D Barbour, seconded by Mr Wright, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the recommendations as per Briefing Paper, and in particular, the introduction of a pilot Day Crewing system in Enniskillen Fire Station”.

Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Procedure

Members were informed that in order to discharge recommendations made in DHSSPS Review of Stores Management & Stock Control within NIFRS (October 2012) and elsewhere in other external reports, NIFRS has developed a revised Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Procedure. The revised Procedure has been agreed with the Representative Bodies and supports the existing Declaration of Interest Policy contained within NIFRS Code of Conduct and the Board Code of Accountability.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that Board ratification was being sought with the intention of implementing the Procedure with effect from 2 February 2015.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Conflict of Interest and Confidentiality Procedure”.

Information Governance Policies & Procedures

Members noted a suite of Information Governance Policies and Procedures, these included:

- Information Governance Framework;
- Information Governance Strategy & Policy;
- Data Quality Policy; and
- Data Sharing Protocol.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that the Policies form the basis of the organisation direction with respect to Information Governance and allow NIFRS to fully discharge a number of internal and external review recommendations. He noted that the S75 screening period had closed at the end of November 2014 and no responses had been received.

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

Resolved: “to approve the aforementioned Information Governance Policies & Procedures”.

Corporate Risk Management Policies & Procedures

Members noted a suite of Corporate Risk Management Policies and Procedures, these included:

- Assurance Framework;
- Revised Corporate Risk Management Strategy; and
- Revised Corporate Risk Management Policy & Procedure.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that the Policies form the basis of the organisation direction with respect to Corporate Risk Management and allow NIFRS to fully discharge a number of internal and external review recommendations. He noted that the S75 screening period had closed at the end of November 2014 and no responses had been received.

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

Resolved: “to approve the aforementioned Corporate Risk Management Policies & Procedures”.

Business Case for Thermal Image Cameras

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the provision of Thermal Image Cameras.

The Director of Finance gave an overview of the Business Case and the Officers answered Members’ questions relating to the project.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the provision of Thermal Image Cameras”.

Pension Issue

Members noted a Briefing Paper outlining an issue relating to the Amendment Orders to the Firefighters’ Pension Scheme and the New Firefighters’ Pension Scheme (NFPS) operational from 1 July 2014.

The Director of Finance reminded Members of the Board’s decision that temporary promotions would no longer be pensionable with effect from 1 July 2014. She explained that whilst the NFPS’ Amendment Order Article 17(B) gave the Board the discretion with regards to payments that were to be treated as pensionable, there appeared to be a contradiction within the NFPS Article 61(6), indicating that temporary promotions should be pensionable.

The Director of Finance informed Members that this contradiction had been raised with DHSSPS. Members noted that DHSSPS had investigated the matter and its Solicitor's Office had advised that the recent Amendment Order does not overrule Article 61(6), therefore, in respect of NFPS, temporary promotions must remain pensionable. The Director of Finance explained that DHSSPS intend to look at the difference in treatment across the Schemes but have advised it will not be changed before the end of the 2014/15 financial year.

The Director of Finance answered Members' questions regarding the matter. The Chairman sought clarification with regard to the potential costs and the Director of Finance explained that NIFRS will be discussing the matter further with DHSSPS and will need to seek DHSSPS approval in respect of any costs.

The Director of HR referred to the Secondment Policy and explained that approval was also being sought to treat secondments in a similar manner to temporary promotions.

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

Resolved: “that in the interim until DHSSPS revisits the Legislation –

- **All members of NFPS are identified and advised of the change in position;**
- **Members of NFPS on temporary promotion pay pension contributions from 1 March 2015;**
- **NIFRS pay employer pension contributions from 1 March 2015 in relation to NFPS temporary promotions;**
- **NIFRS contact DHSSPS to obtain agreement that NIFRS pay both the employee and employer contributions in relation to NFPS members who were on temporary promotion from 1 July 2014 to 28 February 2015;**
- **NIFRS treat secondments in a similar manner to temporary promotions”.**

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

This Item was deferred to the end of the Meeting.

Item 8: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 9: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Emergency One (UK) Limited – Supply and Delivery of All Terrain Vehicles;
Fire Service College – Provision of Specialist Operational Training; and
IJK Timber Group – Supply of Oriented Strandboard (OSB) Type 2.

Item 10: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

**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.

At this point,
all the Officers and Observers left the Meeting
and the Head of HR Advisory joined the Meeting

During the Closed Session, Members unanimously agreed that the Chairman discuss with DHSSPS and the Minister the recruitment of a combined Chief Fire Officer/Chief Executive role (in line with the 2006 Order), along with an appropriate remuneration package for the role.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.55 PM
