

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

24 FEBRUARY 2015

10.00 AM

PRESENT: Dr J McKee, Chairman presiding
Mr C Kerr, Interim Chief Fire Officer
Cllr D Barbour
Mr J Barbour
Cllr M Carr
Mr K Henning
Ald Mrs G Rice
Mr G Smyth
Cllr A Watson

APOLOGIES: Mr T Wright
Mr A Hanna

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 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 D Jordan, 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 of Meeting – 27 January 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 January 2015, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, subject to an amendment, on the motion of Mr Henning, seconded by Mr D Barbour.

Arising from the Minutes:

Budget 2015/16 Planning Scenarios

The Chairman informed Members that he had written to the Minister to withdraw his earlier opinion that NIFRS could manage a potential cut of 7% albeit with significant operational and political risks and he is now of the view that NIFRS will struggle to deliver even 5% in one year without avoiding potentially damaging impacts.

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

Service Delivery Committee – Minutes – 3 February 2015

The Minutes of the Service Delivery Committee Meeting held on 3 February 2015 to be deferred to the next Meeting of the Board.

Mr J Barbour, Chairman of the Service Delivery Committee, reported on the key Business discussed particularly –

- Retained Crewing Issues - Committee advised of actions taken and ongoing work to address the risk of RDS appliances being unable to respond, responding with less than 4 Riders and having increased response/attendance times - initial interim coping arrangements and control measures agreed in order to address the immediate issue of RDS appliances responding with less than 4 Riders;
- The Committee received updates with respect to Emergency Response; Fire Safety, including an overview of a revised protocol for responding to Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs); Operational Support and Health & Safety. The Committee approved NIFRS Health & Safety Strategy 2015-2020;
- Proposal to Permanently Introduce the use of 'Hybrid' Specialist Appliances and extend the use of 'Flexible Crewing' Arrangements for Aerial Appliances was circulated to the Committee for consideration/comment.

At this point,
Mr Watson joined the Meeting

The Chairman referred to the Retained Crewing issues and explained that given the concerns raised regarding this matter he had raised it in discussion with NJC colleagues. He stated that NJC colleagues were managing similar issues and gave an example of how certain RDS issues were being addressed in Wales.

Resources Committee – Minutes – 3 February 2015

The Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 3 February 2015 to be deferred to the next Meeting of the Board.

Mr Carr, Chairman of the Resources Committee, gave a brief overview of the key Business discussed including:

- RDS Availability – Committee received a Retained Availability Options Paper presentation. The Committee gave approval to proceed with the piloting of potential solutions and the recruitment planning;
- Draft Property Asset Management Plan 2014/15-2019/20 – draft Plan presented for information;
- Review of the Regional Control Centre within NIFRS – Committee considered and approved the Report on the Review along with the Regional Control Centre Structural Review Implementation Plan.

Remuneration Committee – Minutes – 3 February 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 3 February 2015, 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 J Barbour.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 12 February 2015

A Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee was held on 12 February 2015.

Mr Smyth, Chairman of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, provided a synopsis of the Business discussed which had included Internal Audit Reports. He referred to discussion at the Meeting regarding the impact of not addressing legacy issues. He acknowledged that an effective delivery of service to the public has to be NIFRS' number one priority but highlighted that by failing to address legacy issues we have/we are putting at increasing risk NIFRS' ability to deliver the standard of services the public have come to expect.

Mr Smyth, whilst acknowledging resourcing issues, stressed the need to address legacy/audit issues and outlined the Committee's request for the Interim Chief Executive and the Corporate Management Team, as a priority, to develop a 'blue print' to address all NIFRS audit issues with clear responsibilities and timeline identified.

The Chairman thanked Mr Smyth for his report. He referred to the Committee's request for a 'blue print' and the timeframe for same and noted the need for cognisance to be taken of the Interim Chief Executive's and Interim Chief Fire Officer's previous comments with regard to capacity issues.

During discussion, Mr Smyth gave a further explanation of the proposed 'blue print' and its purpose emphasising that it would be an overarching document which the Organisation will be measured against. He stated that the work completed/ongoing to address issues had been recognised by BSO, however, he stressed the need to address governance matters. He accepted that the timeframe is challenging but pointed out the need to allocate resources in order to get results.

Referring to his induction meeting with BSO, Mr Smyth informed Members that BSO had reported positively on the Corporate Management Team's awareness of issues and their recognition of the work to be done.

Item 5: Chairman's Business

National Joint Council Matters

The Chairman gave an overview of the Business discussed at a recent NJC meeting.

Item 6: Strategic Standalone Items

2015/16 Budget Letter

Members noted a copy of DHSSPS correspondence relating to NIFRS financial allocations and business planning for 2015/16.

The Interim Chief Executive noted that the 2015/16 current expenditure allocation would be below £70m based on a 5.5% reduction. He highlighted that this reduction was recurrent and that there remains the potential for further in-year reductions.

The Interim Chief Executive commented on the significant work involved in respect of budget preparations, the delay in NIFRS receiving notification of its budget allocation and the impact of in-year efficiencies not being fulfilled.

The Interim Chief Executive drew Members' attention to Paragraph 14 of the DHSSPS letter and explained that NIFRS, in preparing its budget plans for 2015/16, is required to liaise with DHSSPS to ensure they have an understanding of saving proposals, prior to formal consideration by the Board.

The Director of Finance provided further detail regarding the budget allocation and explained that the current expenditure is to be allocated across 2 ring-fenced areas - Administration and Fire and Rescue Services. She outlined work underway within the Finance Directorate to identify budget requirements and the funding available across all budget spends and stressed that the 2015/16 budget allocation is going to be challenging. The Director of Finance informed Members that detailed budget proposals for implementation on 1 April 2015 will be presented to the Board Meeting on 31 March.

During discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions regarding various budget matters.

The Interim Chief Executive commented on the NIFRS budget and the difficulties associated with not having flexibility. He explained that it was going to be difficult to build the budget and emphasised that NIFRS' ability to do what it would want to do will be constrained. He informed Members of funding available to Fire & Rescue Services in GB for transformational change and invest to save noting that NIFRS is making change without access to additional funding.

Referring to the DHSSPS correspondence, Members drew attention to Paragraphs 13 and 15 and stressed the need for DHSSPS to be made absolutely clear of the risk to Firefighter safety and public safety as a result of the budget reduction.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that the Corporate Management Team will be revisiting the full programme of NIFRS services, including statutory and non-statutory, and stated there will be a professional input to any proposals.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer explained any potential savings plan will be linked to service implications and the response to DHSSPS will highlight the potential impacts on Firefighter safety and public safety. He stated that DHSSPS will need to mitigate the risks contrary to the Minister's expectations.

The Chairman pointed out the need for the Corporate Management Team to have time to prepare the 2015/16 budget plan and proposed that the Board Meeting on 31 March be held in the morning. This was agreed.

During further discussion, Members expressed concern regarding the timeframe for developing a budget plan and the lack of opportunity to consider any plan in detail prior to submission to DHSSPS. The Interim Chief Executive highlighted the significant work already completed in respect of the budget planning scenarios and explained that this would form the basis of the 2015/16 budget plan. He stated that, following receipt of the DHSSPS correspondence, NIFRS now had a clear direction as to the way forward.

RDS Availability and Crewing Issues

The Interim Chief Fire Officer updated Members on the current position with respect to RDS availability and crewing issues. He advised Members of actions taken and ongoing work to address the risk of RDS appliances being unable to respond, responding with less than 4 Riders and having increased response/attendance times. He explained that in order to address the immediate issue of RDS appliances responding with less than 4 Riders initial interim coping arrangements and control measures had been agreed. He further explained that a corporate review of responding with less than 4 Riders had been initiated.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer informed Members that he and the Director of HR were actively considering the role, structure and remit of the RDS Working Group.

In response to a request from the Chairman, the Interim Chief Fire Officer updated the Meeting on progress with respect to the move to day crewing at Enniskillen Fire Station.

Pension Issues

Temporary Promotions

Members noted a Briefing Paper updating Members on the temporary promotion issue following the Board's decision, at its Meeting on 27 January 2015, that temporary promotions should be treated as pensionable in both the Firefighters' Pension Scheme and the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme.

The Director of Finance gave an overview of the current position. She noted that a Secondment Policy was now in place and explained that approval was being sought to treat secondments in a similar manner.

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

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

- **NIFRS treats secondments in a similar manner to temporary promotions;**

- **NIFRS contacts DHSSPS for agreement to pay the employee contributions in relation to FPS and NFPS members who were on new temporary promotion from 1 July 2014 to 28 February 2015; and**
- **NIFRS gives their agreement to DHSSPS for the removal of the New Firefighters' Pension Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 Article 61(6).**

Changes to Pension Legislation

The Board noted a Briefing Paper updating Members following a review of changes to governance and administration of Firefighters' Pension Schemes.

The Director of Finance outlined the background to the Paper explaining that the Public Service Pension Action 2013 and the Public Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 requires NIFRS to establish new arrangements for governance including a mechanism to control future costs of their Pension Schemes. She gave an overview of the structures which the Legislation requires to be established and also gave Members an update on the preparation for the changes required by the new Legislation which are due to become effective in April 2015.

Members noted that further discussions will take place with DHSSPS and FBU. A supplementary paper will be presented at the next Board Meeting for consideration and approval.

Death in Service Case

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to a Death in Service case. The Director of Finance gave an overview of the Pension issue.

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

Resolved: “to obtain the written opinion of a qualified medical practitioner”.

Draft Corporate Plan 2015-2020 and Draft Directorate Business Plans 2015/16

Members noted the draft Corporate Plan 2015-2020 and draft Directorate Business Plans 2015/16.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that the draft Corporate Plan 2015-2020 was work in progress and outlined how the plan was developed and how it is proposed to progress same. She noted that both the Board and the Corporate Management Team will monitor progress against the Plan.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance stated that Members' comments regarding the draft Plans would be welcome.

During discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions and provided clarification regarding various aspects relating to the draft documentation.

Mr Watson sought clarification as to whether the proposed budget cuts had been incorporated within the Plan. The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that the Directorate Plans were to reflect any austerity measures. She further explained that once the Plan had been finalised, NIFRS will consider its corporate KPIs.

Business Cases

Appointment of a Media Agency for NIFRS

Members noted the Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for the Appointment of a Media Agency for NIFRS.

The Director of Finance outlined briefly the purpose of the project. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford stressed the importance of appointing a Media Agency to enable NIFRS to promote Community Safety.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the Appointment of a Media Agency for NIFRS”.

Support of Hardware (Capita)

Members noted the Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for the Support of Hardware (Capita).

The Director of Finance gave a brief overview of the project for the provision of support and maintenance of NIFRS Corporate Management Information Systems and Retained Payroll Infrastructures.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for the Support of Hardware (Capita)”.

RDS Watch Commander Payments

Members noted the Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for RDS Watch Commander Payments.

The Director of Finance gave a brief overview of the background to the provision of back pay in respect of Watch Commanders on multi-pump Stations moving to Watch Commander ‘B’ rate of pay.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for RDS Watch Commander Payments”.

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

The Chairman noted that the Ad Hoc Working Group continues to work with DHSSPS with regard to the appointment of a substantive Head of Service.

Item 7: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 8: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

TBF Thompson – Automotive Filters;
Dennison Commercials Limited – Parts for Volvo Trucks; and
Stahrs Limited – Provision of a Job Evaluation Service.

Item 9: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings. The Chairman noted that the March Board Meeting would be held on 31 March 2015 at 10.00 am.

Chief Fire Officer Appointment – Greater Manchester FRS

The Chairman informed Members that a former NIFRS employee, Peter O'Reilly, had been appointed as Chief Fire Officer of Greater Manchester Fire & Rescue Service. He stated that, on behalf of the Board, he would write to Mr O'Reilly to extend congratulations on his appointment.

Notice of Retirement

The Chairman paid tribute to the Interim Chief Fire Officer commending him for all his work and his dedication to NIFRS. The Members also showed their appreciation.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer expressed his appreciation to Board Members, Corporate Management Team colleagues, in particular Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford, and also the Area Commanders for their work and support. He also extended his appreciation to Mr J Barbour, acknowledging his FBU role, for his contribution and work for the Organisation.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 12.00 NOON
