

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

31 MARCH 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 A Hanna
Mr K Henning
Ald Mrs G Rice
Mr G Smyth
Cllr A Watson
Mr T Wright

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
Mr D Nichol, FBU Observer

It was noted that prior to the commencement of the Meeting, the Chairman, on the behalf of the Board, had marked the end of Cllr D Barbour's tenure extending his best wishes and thanks to Cllr Barbour for his support and contribution.

Item 1: Apologies

There were no apologies.

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.

The Chairman noted that, in accordance with Paragraph 21 of the Code of Accountability for Board Members, the Chairman and Board Members must formally declare any business interests, position of authority in a charity or voluntary body in the field of health and social care, and any connection with a voluntary or other body contracting for NIFRS' services, and also any Directorships and other significant interests held.

The Chairman and Members, with the exception of Mr Hanna and Mr Wright, declared they had no conflicts of interest. Mr Hanna declared that he is a non-executive Member of the BSO Board. Mr Wright declared that he is a non-executive Member of the Health & Safety Executive Board.

Item 3: Minutes of Meeting – 24 February 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 February 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:

Pension Issues Changes to Pension Legislation

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to the Governance and Administration of Firefighters' Pension Schemes.

The Director of Finance updated Members on progress with regard to the preparation for the changes required by the Public Service Pension Act 2013 and the Public Services Pension Act (Northern Ireland) 2014. The Legislation changes require NIFRS to establish new arrangements for governance including a mechanism to control future costs of their Pension Schemes and are due to become effective in April 2015. She noted that NIFRS has been attending tripartite meetings with DHSSPS and FBU to agree the way forward.

The Director of Finance provided a synopsis of the structures which the Legislation requires to be established to make the Schemes more accountable to its members and taxpayers. She explained that the NIFRS Board is the Scheme Manager and further explained that it may delegate any functions under these Regulations. She also gave Members an overview of the proposed way forward to ensure NIFRS compliance with the Legislation from 1 April 2015, including the make-up of the Pension Board. The Director of Finance explained that at present it is suggested that the Chair position is rotated until the business/reporting requirements are established.

During discussion, the Director of Finance answered Members' questions and provided further clarification with regard to aspects of the information presented.

Referring to the Scheme Advisory Board to be established by DHSSPS, the Chairman suggested that the Director of Finance be appointed to represent NIFRS on this Board as Pensions was part of her portfolio.

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

Resolved: “to approve the designation of the NIFRS Board as the Scheme Manager and the establishment of the Pension Board as detailed within the Briefing Paper”.

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

Resolved: “that the Director of Finance be appointed as the NIFRS representative on the Scheme Advisory Board”.

Death in Service Case

Members noted a Briefing Paper providing an update from the February Board Meeting with respect to the Death in Service case.

The Director of Finance gave an overview of the current position following receipt of the written opinion of NIFRS’ Medical Practitioner. She explained that, based on the legal and medical advice received, Part 2, Paragraph 3 of the legislation cannot be enacted.

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

Resolved: “to approve that Paragraph 3 of Part 2 of the Firefighters Compensation Scheme Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 cannot be enacted in respect of this Case.”

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

Service Delivery Committee – Minutes – 3 February 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee held on 3 February 2015, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record on the motion of Mr D Barbour, seconded by Mrs G Rice.

Special Service Delivery Committee – Meeting – 24 March 2015

Members noted that a Special Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee had been held on 24 March 2015.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer referred to the discussion at the Special Meeting regarding RDS availability issues and operational safety and highlighted the importance of ensuring operational governance given the potential implications. He also stressed the importance of the full Board being made aware of these concerns and the potential implications.

At this point,
an observer joined the Meeting

Mr J Barbour, Chairman of the Service Delivery Committee, informed Members that the Special Meeting had been convened to discuss the core issues of Retained Duty (RDS) availability and Operational Safety. He gave a detailed overview of the Committee’s discussions emphasising that operational safety is a key vulnerability for the Organisation.

Mr J Barbour referred to the Stirling University Report - Firefighter Fatalities at Fires in the UK: 2004-2013: Voices from the Fireground and suggested that all Board Members should receive a copy of the Report along with a copy of the report regarding the fatality of Firefighter Ewan Williamson.

Mr J Barbour stressed that RDS availability and operational safety were key areas needing to be addressed. He also pointed out the need to join-up the work of the Service Delivery Committee and the Resources Committee.

At this point,
Mr Watson left the Meeting

Mr Wright commented on the discussions at the Committee Meeting and suggested that the documentation circulated at the Special Service Delivery Committee Meeting of 24 March be circulated to all Members for information. Mr Wright, whilst noting that interim measures were in place to mitigate the risk of the RDS availability issue, explained the importance of addressing this key organisational risk.

The Director of HR commented on the Gartan system and explained that NIFRS now had a much clearer picture regarding RDS availability. He updated Members on RDS recruitment plans for 14 Stations.

During discussion, the Interim Chief Fire Officer noted the link between RDS availability and sub-optimal crewing issues. He also noted the reduction in calls and highlighted the impact of this reduction on experience. He stressed the importance of effective training to mitigate the risk to Firefighter and public safety. The Interim Chief Fire Officer commented on the training facilities for BA and CFFT training and the impact of lack of investment in training facilities and pointed out the need to move training forward. He also explained that NIFRS had no fallback position without incurring substantial costs. The Interim Chief Fire Officer expressed his concern regarding the potential impact of austerity with respect to training.

The Chairman acknowledged the Director of HR's Report which highlighted training completed and ongoing. He also referred to the upgrading of Enniskillen Fire Station to Day Crewing which was a positive step forward.

Further discussion took place during which the Officers answered Members' questions and noted their comments with regard to the RDS availability and operational safety and welcomed the actions to date to address same.

It was subsequently agreed that the documentation presented at the Special Service Delivery Committee Meeting of 24 March be circulated to the remainder of the Board, along with a copy of the Stirling University Report: Firefighter Fatalities at Fires in the UK: 2004-2013: Voices from the Fireground and the Interim Chief Fire Officer undertook to share the report regarding the fatality of Firefighter Ewan Williamson with Members.

The Board also requested that an Action Plan, with timelines, be developed to address RDS issues in terms of numbers, skills and qualifications and critical Firefighter training, particularly Incident Command Training.

Resources Committee – Minutes – 3 February 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 3 February 2015, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Mr Henning.

At this point,
Mr D Barbour left the Meeting

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

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee held on 12 February 2015, 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 J Barbour, seconded by Mr Wright.

Mr Smyth, Chairman of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, updated Members on the current position with respect to the development of an overarching document to address all NIFRS audit issues noting that he had met the Interim Chief Executive and the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance to review progress. He stated the need for joined-up thinking with external stakeholders and explained that he would be raising the issues discussed at a future meeting with BSO.

Referring to the legacy issues, Mr Smyth acknowledged that some issues were no longer relevant and emphasised the need to focus on priority 1 issues. He reiterated the impact of failing to address legacy issues on NIFRS' ability to deliver the standard of services the public have come to expect. Mr Smyth acknowledged that progress is being made and commended the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance and the Corporate Management Team on their approach to this matter. He added that the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee will be discussing the Improvement Plan at the next Meeting.

During discussion, Mr Smyth explained that the purpose of the 'blue print' is to provide clarity with regard to NIFRS audit issues, not only to the Organisation but also external stakeholders, ie, DHSSPS and Internal Audit.

At this point,
Mr D Barbour re-joined the Meeting

The Interim Chief Fire Officer referred to the issue of resources and expressed the frustration of the Corporate Management Team and Senior Managers with regard to the impact of reactive work on planned work.

Item 5: Chairman's Business

The Chairman referred to his attendance at a recent Chief Executives' Forum event to mark the launch of the Northern Ireland Audit Office's Conflicts of Interest Good Practice Guide. He commended the publication and asked that it be shared with Board Members and the Corporate Management Team.

Committee Membership

The Chairman noted that the membership of Committees will need to be considered due to Cllr D Barbour's tenure ending that day. He explained that, due to time constraints, he would consider the matter and invite Members to participate on Committees as appropriate.

Board Governance Self-Assessment Tool

Members noted the draft Board Governance Self-Assessment 2014/15 submission.

Mr Hanna, Chairman of the Working Group, provided an overview of the submission preparation acknowledging the significant work carried out by the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance, Business Assurance Manager and the Board Administrative Secretary. He highlighted the progress made over the 3 years of the self-assessment process and advised Members that the Working Group was content to recommend approval of the submission.

The Chairman expressed his appreciation to all those involved for their work.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance informed Members that, as this is the third year of the self-assessment process, the submission will be audited as part of the Internal Audit Plan. She explained that that an Action Plan will also be taken forward.

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

Resolved: “to approve the draft NIFRS Board Governance Self-Assessment 2014/15 submission”.

Item 6: Chief Executive's Business – Directors' Updates

Director of Operations

Members noted the Director of Operations' Report.

The Interim Chief Fire Officer drew Members' attention to Emergent Issues/Control Measures which details a number of projects which have been initiated to address the emergent operational issue of the Retained Duty System. He noted that the Service Delivery Committee pack to be circulated to Members would provide further information.

He also drew Members' attention to the initiation of a project to further develop the concept of Rapid Intervention Team (RIT) procedures within NIFRS for the rescue and removal of Firefighters during 'Firefighter Emergency' situations. He explained that this will supplement the existing Firefighter Assistance and Search Team (FAST) capability provided by NIFRS SRT.

In response to questions from the Chairman, the Interim Chief Fire Officer outlined how failures to respond were addressed and also provided clarification regarding the information presented in respect of Wholetime mobilisations.

In a response to a question from Mr J Barbour regarding the timeline for the pilot Day Crewing system in Enniskillen, the Interim Chief Fire Officer explained that the target for introduction of the pilot was May.

Director of Operational Support

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operational Support.

Referring to the Operational Assessment & Fire Peer Challenge for NIFRS to be conducted between 1 and 5 June 2015, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Graham informed Members that an initial visit by the Operational Assessment & Fire Peer Challenge Team will take place early April.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Graham updated Members on the current position with respect to Operational Risk Management consultation documents.

Mr Hanna, whilst supporting the Peer Review process, sought clarification as to the rationale for the exercise.

The Interim Chief Executive explained the Corporate Management Team welcomed the Peer Challenge process given that the Organisation has been asking for an accountability framework. He reminded Members that a Peer Challenge had been planned for last year but that the Corporate Management Team had felt it appropriate to defer same due to budget issues. He further explained that DHSSPS had subsequently mandated an Operational Assessment & Fire Peer Challenge for NIFRS.

Director of Community Protection

Members noted the Director of Community Protection's Report. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford highlighted the following key points:

- Prevention - Community Planning – noted that each Community Planning partnership has now been allocated a senior officer at Area Commander level;
- Protection – noted with concern that 6 'fatal fire reviews' had been convened to date. Members were informed that attendance at Review meetings had recently been extended to include other stakeholders such as PSNI, Health Trusts, etc;
- Road Safety – Road Safety Partnership Sub-Group established to investigate alternative methods of working cohesively to deliver the key messages.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford informed Members that the advertising budget had been significantly reduced and explained that this was a major constraint to delivering Community Safety messages.

Discussion took place with regard to the new Council boundaries and the potential impact on NIFRS structures, etc. The Interim Chief Executive explained that NIFRS will consider its position in the future once the new structures were embedded. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Ashford, whilst welcoming the opportunities for more joined-up working, pointed out that there will be a need to consider resources particularly as Planning Partnerships mature.

Director of Finance

The Director of Finance's Report was noted. The Director of Finance drew Members' attention to the projected Revenue year-end outturn and explained that an underspend of circa £100k was projected.

Referring to the projected Capital year-end outturn, the Director of Finance informed Members that it is anticipated that the full allocation will be spent.

With respect to Procurement, the Director of Finance updated Members on the current position with regard to the BSO review of Procurement Services.

Director of HR

A revised Report from the Director of HR was circulated.

The Director of HR highlighted the current position with respect to Section 75 Consultations and also Attendance Management noting that absence levels had fallen.

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

Director of Planning, Performance & Governance

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

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance updated Members on progress with regard to the recruitment of a temporary Head of Corporate Communications and thanked Members for their patience.

Item 7: Strategic Standalone Items

2015/16 Budget

Members noted a Briefing Paper outlining the proposed budget allocations for 2015/16, along with draft correspondence to Mr P Toogood, DHSSPS.

The Director of Finance outlined the background to the development of the budget proposals explaining that detailed discussions had taken place with Directors and budget holders in further developing the scenarios submitted to DHSSPS on 8 December 2014. She stated that all options had been critically re-examined and costed and referred Members to the Summary of Budget Proposals and the associated high level assumptions on which these were based. She noted that the Corporate Management Team had striven to protect service delivery on the basis of its 3 fundamental principles, ie -

- The impact on public safety;
- The impact Firefighter safety; and
- The impact on employees.

The Director of Finance provided an overview of the budget criteria and the detailed analysis which has resulted in a projected 2015/16 deficit of circa £450k. She explained that it was anticipated in NIFRS' submission to DHSSPS, on 8 December 2014, that NIFRS would breakeven with a 5.5% reduction in budget. However, the FBU have recently decided to cease, from 1 April 2015, all interim coping mechanisms for operational crewing which were introduced in 2014/15. She stated that this will have an immediate impact on operational overtime which NIFRS had envisaged could be further substantially reduced in 2015/16. Members were informed that for 2015/16 budget purposes, operational overtime has still been projected at 2014/15 levels which will be a challenging target if the interim coping measures are not in place.

The Chairman advised Members of a recent meeting with FBU representatives at which the Vice-Chairman had also been in attendance. He stated that the Union Representatives had pointed out the Board's responsibility for safeguarding the public and for Firefighter safety and had challenged the longer-term sustainability of the interim coping arrangements.

Discussion took place with regard to the information presented, during which Members expressed concern with respect to approving a deficit budget. The Interim Chief Executive explained that he considered the £450k deficit a shortfall in the budget required by NIFRS to deliver its service. He stated the termination of the interim coping arrangements to reduce overtime had a significant impact on the budget and stressed that the anticipated reduction in overtime expenditure was not sustainable due to the risks previously discussed. He stated that NIFRS will not be able to live within the 5.5% reduction in funding without it having an adverse impact on public or Firefighter safety.

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At this point
Mrs Rice left the Meeting

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The Officers noted Members' concerns and provided further clarification regarding the budget proposals. The Interim Chief Fire Officer commented on the overtime expenditure position and highlighted that, with the goodwill of the FBU, they had worked together to put in place the interim coping mechanisms to reduce overtime expenditure. He explained that he would have been reviewing the interim measures as the Organisation could not continue to sustain the current crewing arrangements. He supported the Interim Chief Executive's position that whilst every effort will be made to achieve a balanced budget overtime expenditure needs to be realistic.

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

Resolved: “to approve the 2015/16 budget and projected savings plan subject to a minor modification and supported discussions with DHSSPS on the projected deficit of £450k”.

THE MEETING ADJOURNED AT 1.15 PM
AND RECONVENED AT 1.30 PM

**Draft Corporate Plan 2015-2020 and
Annual Business Plan 2015/16**

Members noted the draft NIFRS Corporate Plan 2015-2020 and Annual Business Plan 2015/16.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance referred to Section 4 of the Corporate Plan which outlines the approach taken to develop the Plan. She also explained that further work is required with regard to NIFRS Key Indicators. Members noted that a further Section had been included – Section 10 – which sets out DHSSPS reporting requirements.

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

Resolved: “to approve the draft NIFRS Corporate Plan 2015-2020 and the Annual Business Plan 2015/16”.

At this point,
Mr Hanna left the Meeting

Estates Survey

Members noted the draft NIFRS Organisational Property Asset Strategy 2015/16-2020/21.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance outlined the purpose of the Strategy explaining that it will provide an overarching framework and policy to allow a medium term property plan to be developed, implemented and maintained. She further explained that the role of Estates is to enable operational functioning in an affordable manner.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance noted that the Strategy primarily focuses on the future development of the NIFRS estate and not on the annual cyclic and reactive maintenance. She explained that annual NIFRS Property Asset Management Plans (PAMP) will be emanating from the Strategy.

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

Resolved: “to approve the draft NIFRS Organisational Property Asset Strategy 2015/16-2020/21”.

NIFRS Loss Register

Members noted the 2014/15 Year to Date Loss Register.

The Director of Finance outlined the background to the Loss Register and explained that following Board approval, the Loss Register would be submitted for Departmental approval. The Director of Finance answered Members’ questions regarding the information presented.

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

Resolved: “to approve NIFRS Year to Date Loss Register”.

Business Cases

Voluntary Exit Scheme linked to Restructuring

Members noted the Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for a Voluntary Exit Scheme linked to Restructuring.

The Director of Finance gave an overview of the background and purpose explaining that the Business Case addressed the current need within NIFRS to fund a Voluntary Exit Scheme for Support Staff. She also explained that the Business Case had been submitted to DHSSPS in parallel due to time constraints. Members were informed that the Business Case covered 5 posts.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for a Voluntary Exit Scheme linked to Restructuring”.

Strategic Outline Business Case for Renewal of Leased Premises at Henry Street, Ballymena

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Strategic Outline Business Case for Renewal of Leased Premises at Henry Street, Ballymena.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance outlined the purpose of the Business Case and the need to extend the lease.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Strategic Outline Case for Renewal of Leased Premises at Henry Street, Ballymena”.

Logistics Support Centre

It was agreed to defer this Item to a future Meeting.

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 and informed Members that Option 3 had been approved by the Minister. He indicated that he would provide further detail at the conclusion of the Meeting.

Item 8: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 9: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

W H Bence Coachworks Limited – supply and delivery of 2 Water Tankers; and
Capita Managed IT Solutions – Support Services for NIFRS MIS and Payroll
Infrastructure.

Item 10: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

Members also noted that it was proposed not to convene a Board Meeting in April, however, this would be confirmed in due course.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 1.55 PM
