

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

26 MAY 2015

1.25 PM

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr J Wallace, Interim Chief Executive
Mr A Walmsley, Assistant Chief Fire Officer (Community Protection)
Mr G Thompson, 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
Mr S Fitzsimons, Capital Projects Manager
Ms I Hill, Board Administrative Secretary
Mr D Jordan, DHSSPS Observer
Mr S Boyd, FBU Observer

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.

Item 3: Presentation – Logistics Support Centre

At this point,
an Observer joined the Meeting

The Capital Projects Manager delivered a presentation on the Logistics Support Centre giving Members a detailed overview of the project which had recently received full Business Case approval.

At this point,
the Capital Projects Manager left the Meeting

During discussion, Members welcomed the progress on this project. The Officers answered Members' questions on various aspects relating to the project.

Item 4: Minutes of Meeting – 31 March 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 March 2015, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Mr Smyth, seconded by Mr Barbour.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Special Service Delivery Committee – Minutes – 24 March 2015

The Chairman referred to the pilot upgrade of Enniskillen Fire Station to a Day Crewing model and sought an update on progress.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson updated Members on the current position noting that the closing date for Firefighters to transfer and Crew and Watch Commander secondments is 1 June 2015.

Item 5: Reports from Board Committees, including Adoption of Committee Minutes

Special Service Delivery Committee – Minutes – 24 March 2015

The Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee held on 24 March 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 Barbour.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 28 April 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee held on 28 April 2015, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record on the motion of Mr Carr, seconded by Mr Watson.

Mr Smyth, Chairman of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, provided a synopsis of the key business discussed at the Meeting. He referred in particular to the Business Improvement Plan and noted that NIAO and both the Internal and External Auditors are supportive of the programme. He pointed out, however, that adequate staff resources to progress the Plan remains an issue.

Mr Smyth informed the Board that the Head of Internal Audit's Year-End Assurance Statement had been presented. He explained that, whilst the overall opinion of Internal Audit for the year ended 31 March 2015 is limited, Internal Audit recognised the progress made and that NIFRS had good awareness of what the issues are and the work that is required to resolve these issues is underway.

The Chairman stressed the need to note capacity issues. He welcomed the positive direction of travel and suggested that the positive feedback from External and Internal Auditors be shared with DHSSPS.

Referring to ICT, the Director of Finance confirmed that one of the 2 IT posts had been filled.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 18 May 2015

Members noted that a Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee had been held on 18 May 2015.

Mr Smyth, Chairman of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, gave an overview of the business discussed at the Meeting. He reiterated the need to address resourcing issues, particularly within the Planning, Performance & Governance Directorate, and noted that the Corporate Management Team are considering the way forward.

Mr Smyth advised Members that the Chief Executive's draft year-end Governance Statement had been noted. The draft Statement acknowledges that whilst the Head of Internal Audit provided overall limited assurance, individually the financial audits carried out during the year achieved satisfactory assurance and no significant control issues were identified in these areas.

Members were informed that the draft Statement of Accounts had been noted; the final Accounts will be presented in draft form to the June Meeting of the Committee for noting. Mr Smyth referred to the Pensions issue raised with respect to last year's Accounts and explained that the External Auditor was content with the Pension assumptions provided by GAD this year.

Resources Committee – Minutes – 28 April 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 28 April 2015, 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.

Arising out of the Minutes:

BSO IT Report

The Chairman referred to the potential move of NIFRS to the Department of Justice (DoJ) and sought an update.

The Interim Chief Executive informed Members that he, the Interim Chief Fire Officer and DHSSPS representatives had had an introductory meeting with DoJ officials. He explained that it was appropriate now to meet again given the need to consider NIFRS strategic direction before any transition.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance provided clarification with regard to Health Estates and also explained the position with regard to the Logistics Support Centre. However, she noted the need for discussions with DoJ in this regard.

The Director of Finance also highlighted the need for discussions and clarification in relation to IT, Procurement and Internal Audit before NIFRS connects to any shared services.

Mr Carr, Chairman of the Resources Committee, noted the discussions regarding RDS availability overlaps with the Service Delivery Committee and suggested that it may be necessary for both Committees to meet.

The Chairman acknowledged there are overlaps and acknowledged the level of work for conveners of all the Committees.

Resources Committee – Minutes – 24 February 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Resources Committee held on 24 February 2015, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record on the motion of Mr Henning, seconded by Mr Carr.

Remuneration Committee – Minutes – 31 March 2015

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 31 March 2015, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record on the motion of Mr Hanna, seconded by Mr Barbour.

Remuneration Committee – Meeting – 26 May 2015

Members noted that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee had been held on 26 May 2015.

The Chairman summarised the business discussed at the Meeting which included the HR Structural Review Implementation Plan and Job Evaluations.

The Director of HR updated Members on the position with regard to the HR Structural Review and the outcomes of a job matching exercise.

At this point
Mr Watson left the Meeting (2.15 pm)

Item 6: Chairman's Business

National Joint Council (NJC)

The Chairman provided a detailed overview of the business discussed at the NJC Meeting held the previous week.

Appointment of Substantive Head of Service

The Chairman updated Members on the current position with respect to the advertisement for the Head of Service and the establishment of an Appointments Panel. The Chairman acknowledged DHSSPS' support in progressing matters.

Item 7: Chief Executive's Business – Directors' Updates

Director of Operations

Members noted the Director of Operation's Report. The Interim Chief Fire Officer answered Members' questions relating to the information presented.

Director of Operational Support

Members noted the Report from the Director of Operational Support.

In response to a query from the Chairman, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson and the Director of HR provided clarification relating to the consultation exercise in respect of proposed changes to crewing arrangements for aerial appliances.

Referring to the issue relating to support for FSEC, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson updated Members on the current position.

During further discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions relating to the information represented regarding the Operational Assessment & Peer Challenge and also Stores and Transport & Engineering Services.

Director of Community Protection

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

- Community Planning – noted potential impact on NIFRS as this presents a significant area of development for future integration between NIFRS and local Councils.
- RADAR Centre – noted PSNI has delivered seed funding for year 1 with sponsorship being sourced for years 2 and 3. He also noted that, although NIFRS are not dealing with the sponsorship for the Centre, it will be using the Centre as a resource.
- Operational Guidance Project – update noted.

The Officers answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

Director of Finance

The Director of Finance's Report was noted. The Director of Finance drew attention to the following:

- Draft Annual Report and Statement of Accounts – the Director of Finance updated Members on the current position and highlighted that a meeting had taken place the previous Friday with the External Auditors and there were no significant issues to report at that time.
- Business Case Update – the Director of Finance referred to the Business Case for a Retained Attendance System and explained that, following a number of queries from DHSSPS, the Business Case had been amended slightly to include disaster recovery and additional interfaces resulting in an increase in the value of the Business Case and sought approval for same.

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

Resolved: “to approve the increase in value of the Business Case for a Retained Attendance System”.

The Director of Finance outlined the current position with respect to Pension issues and pension administration software in particular. She noted that, as part of the direction from the Executive, discussions were ongoing with regard to the potential for a shared service with BSO. She explained that once the position with DoJ had been clarified a report would be presented to the Resources Committee.

Director of HR

The Director of HR's Report was noted. The Director of HR referred to the Attendance Management Update highlighting that the year-end outturn for 14/15 was 9.8 shifts lost per person as compared to 10.5 in 13/14. He acknowledged that there was still work to be done with regard to Attendance Management.

The Director of HR noted the updates with respect to Occupational Health, Training & Development and RCC Recruitment. He answered Members' questions regarding the information presented.

Director of Planning, Performance & Governance

Members noted the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance's Report. The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance highlighted the following:

- Corporate Business Plan Q4 Update 14/15 – Progress Report approved by the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, however, it was noted that overall performance was not as hoped primarily due to the impact of managing budget issues.
- Business Plan 2015/16 – the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that the revised Business Planning Reporting Templates had been withdrawn as these needed to be considered further. The Templates will be presented to the June Board Meeting.
- Corporate Communications – Members noted that a Head of Corporate Communications had been appointed on a short-term contract.
- Insurance for Fleet – the Director of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that this is currently under review and sought Members' agreement to progress this with DHSSPS – Members agreed that Insurance for Fleet be progressed with DHSSPS.

The Chairman referred to media enquiries and reminded Members of the protocol, as per Standing Orders, for dealing with same. He encouraged Members to adhere to the protocol.

Item 8: Strategic Standalone Items

Committee Membership

Members noted that the Chairman had asked Mr K Henning to serve on the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee and Mrs G Rice to serve on the Remuneration Committee.

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

Resolved: “to approve the aforementioned appointments to Committees”.

Budget 2015/16 Savings Plan

Members noted the 2015/16 Finance Budget Paper incorporating an update on the Budget 2015/16 Savings Plan. Members also noted that formal notification of NIFRS revenue allocation of £69,777,855 had been received from DHSSPS; this represents a reduction of £4,061,145 (5.5%) from the opening 2014/15 position.

The Director of Finance referred to the budget proposals presented to the March Meeting of the Board and also to the budget pressure of £450k which had been identified and subsequently notified to DHSSPS. She outlined the background to the development of the Savings Plan, noting that discussions had taken place with DHSSPS officials with regard to the Savings Plan and the budget pressure.

The Chairman, whilst acknowledging that DHSSPS had been notified of the budget pressure, expressed concern regarding the difficult position of the Board in dealing with a deficit budget.

The Director of Finance assured Members that NIFRS is allocating its budget as per the notification and explained that NIFRS will work with DHSSPS regarding the funding pressure.

During discussion, the Interim Chief Executive highlighted that the information presented was the same as presented previously but in a different format to meet the requirements of DHSSPS. He stated that NIFRS had been open and transparent with regard to its budget allocations and explained that he believed there is a budget pressure linked to overtime. He noted, however, that the Minister and the Permanent Secretary will still expect NIFRS to deliver on budget. He assured Members that work will continue with budget holders and DHSSPS to address this budget shortfall.

Following further discussion, during which the Officers noted Members’ comments and concerns relating to the budget position, the Board, on the motion of Mrs Rice, seconded by Mr Smyth, unanimously –

Resolved: “to approve the Budget 2015/16 Savings Plan and to support ongoing discussions with DHSSPS on the funding pressure of £450k”.

Revised Business Planning Reporting Templates

This Item was deferred to the next Board Meeting.

Pension Matters

Presentation – Regulating the Reformed Pension

Members were informed that NIFRS employees and Union Representatives had recently attended a training session by the Pension Regulator. Members noted a copy of the Pension Regulator’s presentation.

The Director of Finance explained that the presentation had been circulated to Members for information purposes as the NIFRS Board is the Scheme Manager.

Mr Barbour suggested the need for training on the Pension changes for Board Members. Mr Hanna concurred, however, suggested that this training should form part of a wider training programme for the new Board Members.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance noted that the Training Plan for the Board was under consideration and agreed that it would be prudent to wait until the new Board appointments are made.

Pension Issue

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to early payment of a deferred Pension.

The Director of Finance gave an overview of the information presented.

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

Resolved: “to approve the payment of the full amount of pension (no reductions) to the individual with effect from 7 February 2014”.

Business Cases

Heavy Rescue Cutting Equipment

The Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for Heavy Rescue Equipment was noted. Assistant Chief Fire Officer Thompson provided an overview of the project and its purpose. Members noted that the Strategic Outline Business Case had been approved by DHSSPS.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Business Case for Heavy Rescue Cutting Equipment”.

Strategic Outline Case for Interim Training Facilities

Members noted the Strategic Outline Case for Interim Training Facilities. The Director of HR provided a synopsis of the interim training solution. He explained that the next stage in the process will be the development of a Business Case.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Strategic Outline Business Case for Interim Training Facilities”.

Strategic Outline Case for Learning Management System

Members noted the Strategic Outline Case for the implementation of a Learning Management System.

The Director of HR gave an overview of the project and its purpose. He noted that a Business Case had also been developed. The Director of Finance explained that it was proposed to submit both the Strategic Outline Case and the Business Case for a Learning Management System to DHSSPS.

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

Resolved: “to approve the Strategic Outline Case and the Business Case for a Learning Management System”.

Item 9: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

The Director of Planning, Performance & Governance informed Members that a report relating to letters of complaints and appreciations will be presented to the next Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee.

Item 10: Sealing of Documents

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with -

Cold Cut Systems Svenska AB – Cutting Fire Extinguishing System; and
Fire Hosetech Limited – HVP Hose Cleaning and Testing.

Item 11: Schedule of Future Meetings

Members noted a schedule of future Meetings.

Resignation – Interim Chief Executive

The Chairman referred to the resignation of the Interim Chief Executive which he had accepted with regret. He stated that the Interim Chief Executive had joined NIFRS in August 2012 during a difficult period for the Organisation and paid tribute to Mr Wallace for all his work and to his leadership in building a cohesive Senior Management team.

The Chairman stated that there will be an opportunity to express the Board’s formal thanks and appreciation at a later stage.

Members noted that the Interim Chief Executive will respond at the next Meeting.

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At this point,
the Officers and Mr Boyd left the Meeting (3.45 pm)

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Interim Arrangements

The Chairman noted that Dale Ashford had been appointed Interim Chief Fire Officer from 12 May 2015. He informed Members that in discussions following the tendering of Mr Wallace's resignation, the Interim Chief Fire Officer had indicated that he is prepared to take on the additional responsibilities of Chief Executive and Accounting Officer from 1 July 2015 until the new Head of Service is appointed. However, the Interim Chief Fire Officer has requested additional operational support to enable him to take on these additional responsibilities.

The Chairman provided an overview of the Interim Chief Fire Officer's proposals for a third Principal Officer and an additional allowance in his salary to reflect the additional responsibilities and the outcome of their discussions regarding same.

The Chairman asked that consideration be given to the appointment of a third Assistant Chief Fire Officer from 1 July 2015 until the appointment of a new Head of Service and an enhancement of 10% on the current Deputy's salary.

Following a full discussion, during which various options with regard to the interim measures were explored, Members gave their support for a third Assistant Chief Fire Officer. However, Members expressed concern regarding the payment of an enhanced allowance to the Interim Chief Fire Officer.

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

Resolved: “to approve the appointment of a third Assistant Chief Fire Officer from 1 July 2015 until the new Head of Service is appointed. The payment of an additional allowance to the Interim Chief Fire Officer was not approved”.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 4.40 PM
