

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

**MINUTES OF A MEETING
(VIRTUAL MEETING)**

26 JANUARY 2021

2.15 PM

PRESENT: Ms C McKinney, Chairperson presiding
Mr M Graham, Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Ms B Anley
Mr J Craig
Mr C Enright
Mr K Henning
Mr R Irvine
Mr T O'Hanlon
Mr J Quinn
Mrs H Singleton
Ms L Smith
Mr G Smyth

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Deeney, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
(Transformation, Performance & Governance)
Mr P Gallagher, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (Service
Delivery)
Mr A Jennings, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (Service
Support)
Mrs P White, Interim Director of Finance
Mrs D O'Connor, Interim Director of Human Resources
Ms I Hill, Governance & Business Support Services Advisor
Ms R Morgan, DoH Observer

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the Meeting.

Item 1: Apologies

There were no apologies from Members.

Item 2: Conflicts of Interest

The Chairperson enquired as to whether any Members of the Board wished to declare any potential conflicts of interest with any of the business items on the Agenda. Members confirmed there were no apparent conflicts of interest.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and Mr Quinn declared a potential conflict of interest with respect to Agenda Item 4 - Exceptional Voluntary Scheme Pays. The Chairperson noted same and stated that she felt it would be appropriate for the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and Mr Quinn to leave the Meeting for this item of business.

Mrs Morgan explained that she felt it would also be appropriate for her not to be present for this item of business.

It was noted that, in accordance with the Code of Conduct and Code of Accountability for Board Members of NIFRS (paragraph 21), the new Members, at the last Meeting, had declared any business interests, positions of authority in a charity or voluntary body in the field of health and social care, any connection with a voluntary or other body contracting for NIFRS' services with the exception of Messrs Craig and O'Hanlon.

Accordingly, the Chairperson asked Messrs Craig and O'Hanlon to formally declare any conflicts of interest.

Mr O'Hanlon declared that he is a District Councillor and that he works for an MLA.

Mr Craig declared that he is a District Councillor and a Member of the Education Authority.

Item 3: Minutes of Board Meeting – 23 November 2020

The Minutes of the Board Meeting held on 23 November 2020, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed as a true record, on the motion of Ms Anley, seconded by Mrs Singleton.

Arising out of the Minutes:

Project Highlight Report

From the Minutes, the Chairperson sought an update with respect to a briefing request from Mr O'Hanlon.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney confirmed that Transformation workstreams will be picked up through the Service Delivery and would also form part of the Board Project Highlight Report.

The Chairperson confirmed that she was very keen that all Members are aware of the Transformation Programme and she was content that it would be coming through as a Project Highlight Report.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney stated that should the Highlight Report not provide enough detail for Members he would liaise with the Chairperson to arrange a follow-up.

Terms of Reference for Standing Committees

The Chairperson noted the current position with respect to the Transformation Oversight Committee explaining that it was hoped to establish the Committee membership within the next couple of months.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer explained that there were some key decisions to be taken with regards to resourcing and noted the impact of insufficient resourcing availability on progressing all the workstreams within the Transformation Programme. He highlighted in particular the challenges in progressing the Red Fleet Review and the Area Management Structure but he hoped to bring the outworkings of these projects as soon as practicable. He advised the Board that he would be engaging with DoH with regard to resourcing.

Finance/HR Service Delivery Model

The Chairperson invited the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer to report on the closed briefing session which had been held immediately prior to the Board Meeting.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted that he had provided Members with feedback from his meeting with DoH officials before the Christmas recess. He explained that Members felt it would be beneficial if a tripartite meeting with senior members of BSO, the NIFRS Board and Departmental representatives could be facilitated. He stated that the Chairperson had requested him on behalf of the Board to liaise with DoH regarding this possibility.

Item 4: Items for Adoption/Approval Reports from Board Committees, including noting of Committee Minutes and Adoption of Recommendations

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 20 January 2021

It was noted that a Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee had been held on 20 January 2021. The Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at the next Meeting of the Board.

Mr Smyth, Chairperson of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, provided a verbal report on the business discussed. He noted the appointment of KPMG as External Auditors and that an Audit of NIFRS Recruitment Processes is to be conducted in place of the deferred Audit of the Governance of Transformation Programme. He informed Members that NIFRS had received satisfactory assurance with respect to the Audit of Bank and Cash. NIFRS had received limited assurance with respect to compliance with National Operating Guidance (NOG). He explained that the Committee had discussed the Audit of NOG in detail, noting concerns in particular with respect to compliance with BA Guidance. He noted that Members had requested updates be presented to the Committee going forward and he would ensure that this happened.

Mr Smyth, proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be adopted by the Board. This was seconded by Mr Irvine.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee - Recommendation

- **Approval to conduct an Audit of NIFRS Recruitment Processes during 20/21;**
- **Acceptance of the Audit of Bank & Cash and Audit of Compliance with National Operating Guidance (NOG).**

The Chairperson referred to the Committee's concerns regarding compliance with BA Guidance and sought assurance from the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer that the Corporate Management Team is addressing this matter.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer in response to the Chairperson assured all Members that this was a key piece of work which he will address working with and through Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Gallagher . He assured Members that updates on NIFRS alignment with NOG will form part of the Project Highlight Report presented to the Service Delivery Committee.

Service Delivery Committee - Meeting – 19 January 2021

It was noted that a Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee had been held on 19 January 2021 and the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at the next Meeting of the Board.

Mr Irvine, Chairperson of the Service Delivery Committee, gave a verbal update on the business discussed noting that the Committee had received a Project Highlight Report on each of the key projects within Service Delivery, Service Support, Finance and ICT. Members noted from Mr Irvine that there were no recommendations emanating from the Meeting.

People & Culture Committee - Meeting – 21 January 2021

It was noted that a Meeting of the People & Culture Committee had been held on 21 January 2021 and the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at the next Meeting of the Board.

Mr Henning, Chairperson of the People & Culture Committee, provided a verbal report on the Business discussed at the Meeting which included updates on key projects.

Mr Henning proposed that the Committee's recommendation, as detailed below, be adopted by the Board. This was seconded Mr Smyth.

People & Culture Committee – Recommendation

- **Approval of the revised NIFRS Brand Guidelines – Visual & Voice.**

Standalone Strategic Items

Change in the Order of Business

The Chairperson proposed that the next Item – Exceptional Voluntary Scheme Pays – be deferred to the end of the Meeting. **Members agreed to this.**

Business Cases

Maintenance and Support for current Mobile Data Solution

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the renewal of Maintenance and Support for the current Mobile Data Solution.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings provided an explanation of the purpose of the Business Case and answered Members' questions relating to same.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Irvine, seconded by Ms McKinney, unanimously agreed to approve the Business Case for the Maintenance and Support for current Mobile Data Solution.

Referring to the Business Cases for the provision of Hardware & Tools; Cordless Power Tools; Pneumatic Equipment; and Water Transfer Equipment, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings explained that the Business Cases had been developed to cover a 7-year period. He gave an outline of the background and the process for developing each of the Business Cases.

During discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions relating to the Business Cases including stock and asset management; affordability; and the management of Direct Award Contracts.

Provision of Hardware & Tools

The Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for the provision of Hardware & Tools was noted.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings outlined the purpose of the project.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Irvine, seconded by Ms Smith, unanimously agreed to approve the Business Case for the Provision of Hardware & Tools.

Provision of Cordless Power Tools

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the provision of Cordless Power Tools.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings gave an overview of the purpose of the project.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Enright, seconded by Mr Irvine, unanimously agreed to approve the Business Case for the Provision of Cordless Power Tools.

Provision of Pneumatic Equipment

Members noted the Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for the provision of Pneumatic Equipment.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings noted the purpose of the Business Case.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Irvine, seconded by Ms Anley, unanimously agreed to approve the Business Case for the Provision of Pneumatic Equipment.

Provision of Water Transfer Equipment

The Executive Summary pertaining to the Business Case for the provision of Water Transfer Equipment was noted.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings gave a brief overview of the purpose of the Business Case.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Craig, seconded by Mr Irvine, unanimously agreed to approve the Business Case for the Provision of Water Transfer Equipment.

Item 5: Items for Information/Noting Standalone Strategic Items

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee - Minutes – 11 November 2020

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee held on 11 November 2020 are attached for the information of Members. The recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 24 November 2020.

Service Delivery Committee - Minutes – 17 November 2020

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee held on 17 November 2020 are attached for the information of Members. The recommendation contained therein was adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 24 November 2020.

People & Culture Committee - Minutes – 18 November 2020

The Minutes of the Meeting of the People & Culture Committee held on 18 November 2020 are attached for the information of Members. The recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 24 November 2020.

Remuneration Committee - Minutes – 23 November 2020

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Remuneration Committee held on 23 November 2020 are attached for the information of Members. The recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 24 November 2020.

Update on Independent Review into Issues around the Investigation Processes and Timescales

Members noted the Independent Review Action Plan Update as at 12 January 2021.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer provided an overview of the information presented highlighting the key achievements up to 12 January and also work ongoing. He noted that the number of recommendations had been reduced to 8 and actions to 10. He also highlighted the planned action for the next reporting period and stated that it is anticipated that all recommendations/actions will be closed by 31 March 2021, dependent on BSO Internal Audit Review and evidence of embeddedness.

The Chairperson sought assurances from the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer that the planned actions were on track. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer explained that the planned policy reviews were progressing and that he is hopeful that this work will be completed in-year.

The Chairperson welcomed the progress achieved to date but stressed the importance of continuing to keep this as a Board priority.

Mr Quinn, Board representative on the Independent Review Working Group, reported positively on progress and stated that he was content the targets will be met.

Project Highlight Report

A Project Highlight Report providing updates on COVID-19; Service Delivery Modelling; and EU Exit was noted.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members on the management of COVID-19. He noted the statistics relating to COVID-19 absences as at 13 January 2021 and outlined the key issues identified during this third wave including guidance updated with respect to the extremely critically vulnerable; and noting the impact of the new variant in the workplace.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members on work ongoing with respect to NIAS support and the consideration of increased health & wellbeing support over next 4/6 weeks. He reported positively on the implementation of NIFRS approach to track and trace; and gave an overview of progress with respect to IPC training; the return to operational training; the return to recruitment activity and the roll out of NIFRS' 6 key messages.

During discussion, the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted Members' comments and answered questions relating to aspects of the information presented.

Mr Quinn stated that NIFRS is one of largest employers and commented positively on how the organisation had managed the impact of COVID-19.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney provided a high level summary of progress with respect to the Service Delivery Modelling workstream of the Transformation Programme. He noted the significant impact of COVID-19 on the ability to progress key areas of work and outlined the measures to address/mitigate same including resourcing.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney updated Members on the current position with respect the establishment of a Programme Management Office; Red Fleet Review; Flexi Duty System Review; Mobilising Review; On-Call Polices and Contracts; Day Duty Review; and the Area Management Structure.

The Chairperson sought clarity, on behalf of the Board, from the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer as to whether the Transformation Business Case had now been approved by DoH. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer then confirmed to Members that the Business Case had not been approved by DoH at that point.

The Chairperson and Members expressed their concern that the Business Case was not yet approved and sought clarification on why this was and what the impact on potential funding for Transformation and resources implications were. Members asked how the Transformation agenda could now proceed given that the funding requested had not been approved.

The Chairperson enquired as to when the Red Fleet Review and the Area Management Structure would be presented to the Board for consideration. She also enquired where funding would come from to roll out Transformation given the absence of Departmental funding to support the programme.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted that significant work had been completed with regard to the Red Fleet Review and Area Management Structure.

At this point,
Mr Quinn left the Meeting

Following further discussion, the Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, requested that the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney meet to discuss the Board's concerns and decide on next steps to ensure a clear organisational direction on the way forward, ie, in-house resourcing; Business Case support and funding to roll out the programme. She noted the Board's view with respect to the need to progress NIFRS' Transformation Programme.

The Chairperson requested that this be given priority attention by the Officers and that an update be brought to the next Board Meeting.

The Meeting adjourned at 4.00 pm for a short break

The Meeting reconvened at 4.10 pm

Referring to the EU Exit Project, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney updated Members on the current position. He provided a synopsis of the RAG status, risks, issues and planned actions.

Finance Report

The Finance Report updating Members on the financial position as at 31 December 2020 was noted.

The Interim Director of Finance gave a detailed overview of the information presented noting the current Revenue Budget and outlined the current position with respect to a budget pressure in the region of £0.4m. She highlighted that the position is being closely monitored.

The Interim Director of Finance provided an explanation of the detail on the key financial risks and assumptions underpinning the revenue budget position particularly noting the impact of COVID-19.

Referring the Capital Budget, the Interim Director of Finance noted the position as at 31 December.

The Interim Director of Finance reported positively on NIFRS Prompt Payment Performance.

The Officers answered Members' questions relating to the information presented.

Planning & Performance Management

Members noted the Annual Business Plan Progress Updates and Performance Management Updates for Quarter 3.

Item 6: Chairperson's Business

New Year's Honours

The Chairperson, on behalf of Board Members, extended congratulations to Station Commander Karen McDowell who was awarded an MBE in the 2021 New Year's Honours list.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer stated Station Commander McDowell had been awarded the prestigious honour for her services to fire and rescue and the LGBTQ community. She has been recognised for her commitment to making Northern Ireland a safer place and being an ambassador for LGBTQ equality.

The Chairperson thanked everyone personally for the condolences and sympathy extended to her and her sister Sheena following the death of their Father.

She also expressed her appreciation to Departmental representatives for their condolences.

Item 7: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 8: Documents for Sealing

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Peter O’Hare Limited - Upgrade of NIFRS HQ Infrastructure & RCC Refurbishment – Decant Works;

Seaview Developments Limited - Larne Fire Station Refurbishment.

Item 9: Schedule of Future Meetings, etc

A Schedule of Meetings, etc, was noted.

The Chairperson noted the schedule for Meetings and also noted that dates for the key Board Business Improvement updates which will be delivered in 2 sessions are to be agreed.

At this point,
the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer; Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officers Deeney,
Gallagher and Jennings; left the Meeting

Exceptional Voluntary Scheme Pays

Mr Craig explained that he felt it was also appropriate for him to leave the Meeting as this point. The Chairperson agreed.

At this point,
Mr Craig left the Meeting (4.30 pm)

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to Voluntary Scheme Pays (VSP) arrangements for the tax liabilities of up to 4 pensioners who have an annual allowance tax charge for the 2019/20 tax year.

The Interim Director of Finance provided a detailed explanation of the pension issue relating to Annual Allowances, including the background information. She noted both the Organisation's and the individual's obligations with regard to the matter of annual allowances. She noted that pension scheme members have an option to refer this matter through the IDR process and to The Pension's Ombudsman.

The Interim Director of Finance noted that NIFRS had sought legal advice on the options available to the organisation to remedy the position for the affected members and gave an overview of the advice received with respect Mandatory Scheme Pays (MSP) and Voluntary Scheme Pays (VSP) and also of the alternative option suggested within the advice. She noted the risks pertaining to the management of the issue.

The Interim Director of Finance informed that a Lessons Learned exercise had been conducted and explained that NIFRS is currently working with HSC Pensions and the system provider with respect to this issue and will be implementing actions necessary to mitigate a recurrence in the future.

The Interim Director of Finance noted the recommendation as contained within the Briefing Paper.

During a full discussion, the Interim Director of Finance noted Members' concerns regarding the options to address the pension issue. She answered Members' questions relating to aspects of the information presented.

At this point,
Mr O'Hanlon left the Meeting (5.20 pm)

Following further discussion, the Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, requested that further legal opinion be sought explicitly addressing the concerns raised by Members regarding corporate liability, etc.

The Chairperson thanked the Interim Director of Finance for her very robust briefing on the matter. She stressed the importance of the Board having clear evidence to support any decision.

It was agreed that a further Meeting will be convened and the Chairperson noted the need for Members to receive a further Briefing Paper incorporating the additional legal advice.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their input.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING ENDED
AT 5.30 PM
