

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

6 DECEMBER 2022

2.00 PM

PRESENT: Ms C McKinney, Chairperson
Mr A Hearn, Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mr J Craig
Mr P Kennedy
Mr J Lennon
Mr T O'Hanlon
Mrs H Singleton
Ms L Smith

APOLOGIES: Ms B Anley
Mr C Enright
Mr R Irvine
Mr J Quinn

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Harper, Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
(in the room) Mr A Jennings, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mr M Deeney, T/Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mrs P White, Director of Corporate Services
Mrs T Ramsay, Director of People & Culture
Miss D Reynolds, Head of Planning, Performance & Governance
Ms I Hill, Governance & Business Support Services Advisor
Mrs L'V Montgomery, DoH Observer
Ms A McNally, DoH Observer

Item 1: Apologies

Apologies from Members were noted.

The Chairperson welcomed new Board Members Paul Kennedy and Jim Lennon, and Mark Deeney in his role as T/Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer.

The Chairperson thanked Mrs J Ramsay and Miss Reynolds and their teams for all their work in arranging the Christmas Fayre. She also extended her appreciation to Paula Jennings and her Team at Stepping Stones for an amazing lunch.

Members expressed their thanks to the Chairperson for personally hosting the Christmas Fayre.

The Chairperson thanked Members and staff for their charity contribution to the NI Hospice. The Chairperson advised that she would report back on the donation at the next Meeting.

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. There were no other apparent conflicts of interest declared.

The Directors of Corporate Services and People & Culture declared a potential conflict with respect to Item 5 – Pay Remit for Support Directors.

Item 3: Minutes of Board Meetings

The Chairperson noted that the Minutes will be circulated under Standing Order 2.6 for approval.

Item 4: Reports from Board Committees, Noting of Committee Minute and Adoption of Committee Recommendations

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 1 November 2022

Members noted that a Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee was held on 1 November 2022 and the Minutes would be presented to a future Board Meeting.

At this point, Mr O'Hanlon
joined the Meeting (2.07 pm)

Ms Smith, Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Member, noted the recommendation emanating from the Meeting.

Ms Smith proposed that the Committee's recommendation to approve the Audit of Risk Critical Information, be adopted by the Board. This was seconded by Mr O'Hanlon.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 17 November 2022

Members noted that a Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee was held on 17 November 2022 and the Minutes would be presented to a future Board Meeting.

Ms Smith presented the recommendations emanating from the Meeting.

Ms Smith proposed that the Committee's recommendations, as detailed below, be adopted by the Board. This was seconded by Mr O'Hanlon.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Recommendations

- **Approval of the Report To Those Charged With Governance;**
- **Approval of the Audit of Health & Safety;**
- **Approval of the Mid-Year Follow-Up Report 2022/23.**

Item 6: Standalone Strategic Items

Pay Remits

Members noted that NIFRS is required to complete a Pay Remit pro-forma and supporting Business Case and submit to DoH and DoF for approval.

Members were advised that the Pay Remits for Support Directors and Support Staff, reflecting the nationally agreed uplifts for 2022/23 are due for submission to DoH and noted same.

The Director of Corporate Services explained why the Pay Remits were being presented to the Board as they are normally presented to the Remuneration Committee in the first instance.

Referring to the Pay Remit for Support Staff, the Director of Corporate Services informed Members that an agreement was reached in November 2022 in relation to a pay award of £1,925 for Administrative pay scales and 4.04% for allowances effective from 1 April 2022. She acknowledged the exceptional achievement of Finance staff in preparing the Pay Remits in such a short timeframe. She noted that it had also been agreed from 1 April 2023 that all employees will receive a permanent increase of one day to their annual leave entitlement explaining that this will be included in the Pay Remit for 2023/24.

The Director of Corporate Services provided an overview of the salient points within the Pay Remit. With respect to the question of affordability, she explained that the increase is affordable subject to DoH's commitment that pay awards impacting the 2022-23 financial year will be met in full.

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

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mrs Singleton, unanimously approved the Pay Remit for Support Staff for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and submission of the documentation to DoH.

Members noted the Pay Remit for Support Directors.

The Director of Corporate Services informed Members that an agreement was reached in November 2022 in relation to a pay award of £1,925 for Support Directors pay scales and allowances effective from 1 April 2022. She gave Members an overview key points within the Pay Remit.

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mr O'Hanlon, unanimously approved the Pay Remit for Support Directors for the period 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and submission of the documentation to DoH.

Performance Management

Members noted the Annual Business Plan Progress Updates and Performance Updates at 30 September 2022.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance provided an overview of the key points within the Annual Business Plan Progress Reporting Summary. She explained that the Executive Leadership Team, following Board discussion and agreement in August, is prioritising the tasks taking cognisance that the HMI review is ongoing.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance provided an overview progress against NIFRS Strategic Performance Indicators. noting progress against strategic outcomes.

During discussion regarding the information presented, Mrs Singleton referred to the SPI relating to accidental house fires and noted the recent tragic fatalities. She noted that targeted messaging at the right time is critical and stated the importance of this messaging continuing throughout the Christmas period.

Noting Members' comments regarding NOG and the impact on progress of resourcing issues, and Members noted that this was a common theme throughout all the progress reports.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer referred to the recent tragic fire fatalities and welcomed Members' acknowledgement of fire prevention messaging. He paid tribute to the work of the Prevention Team noting that NIFRS had been nominated for an award at The Fire & Excellence Awards taking place next week.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings informed Members that the nomination related to the NIFRS Safer Together Project highlighting that this was an excellent example in collaboration. The Project is a partnership between Belfast Health & Social Care Trust and NIFRS which aims to reach those most at risk from fire in our community.

The Chairperson stated that she felt it would be useful for Members to receive a presentation on the Project.

Action – Arrangements to be made for a presentation on the “Safer Together” Project for the Service Delivery Committee and/or Board

Members noted the Performance Reports for Service Delivery, People & Culture and Audit, Risk & Governance Committees.

Members welcomed that the Plans were being progressed and that cognisance is also taken of the potential outcomes of the HMI review.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer accepted the need to bear in mind that the Plan could change post the HMI review.

The Chairperson advised that it is anticipated that the Board will receive an update on the HMI review after Christmas.

Finance Report

The Finance Report updating Members on the financial position for the period ended 31 October 2022 was noted.

The Director of Corporate Services informed Members that a funding bid specifically for recruitment and overtime pressures of £2.7m has been approved by DoH and the allocation was confirmed in August. She also informed Members of a further exercise commissioned by DoH in August to identify inescapable pressures that require additional support and advised that initial indications are that £2m of the £2.3m bid has been successful.

The Director of Corporate Services stated that this significant investment from DoH recognises NIFRS pressures with regard to ill-health retirement costs and acknowledges the risk that the costs of IT staff TUPE may now materialise in-year as GAD has restarted this process.

Members noted the Revenue position as at 31 October 2022 shows an underspend of £625k. The Director of Corporate Services provided an explanation of the key points within the information presented.

With respect to Capital performance, the Director of Corporate Services updated Members on the Capital spend at 31 October 2022.

Members noted the position with respect to Prompt Payment Performance and also Business Case approvals.

During discussion, Members noted the financial support provided by DoH. The Officers answered Members' questions/provided updates regarding the information presented particularly with respect to On-Call recruitment; the LDC project and critical posts.

Item 6: Chairperson's Business

Industrial Action Update

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members on progress following the Special Board Meeting on 25 November. He noted work ongoing with the key stakeholders with a meeting scheduled for Thursday.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer reported positively on recent meetings with the FBU, including Matt Wrack the Union's General Secretary and also the Permanent Secretary.

Accountability Meeting

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer reported positively on the recent Accountability Meeting with the Permanent Secretary. He noted that Ms McKinney was in attendance who also confirmed that it was a very positive meeting.

LFB Culture Review

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted the publication of the London Fire Brigade Culture Review and commented that it is an issue that potentially every Fire & Rescue Service will need to consider. He stated that ELT will consider the report.

Mr O'Hanlon suggested that it would be useful , in the first instance, for the Report to be considered by the Equality & Diversity Forum. The Chairperson advised that it would be important for the Board to be proactively involved in the formulation of an action plan.

Action – Action Plan flowing from that Report and others to be developed

Command & Control Project

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings updated Members on the current position with respect to the Command & Control Project supplier's financial position.

He advised Members that at a meeting with the supplier, the supplier informed NIFRS that they were experiencing financial difficulties and they are the subject of a French Courts "Redressment Judiciaire" and are currently in a 6-month observation period. He noted that all the key stakeholders been briefed.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings also briefed Members on meeting with legal on 30 November. He explained that once the legal advise has been received next steps will be considered noting the need for a quick decision.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings updated Members with respect to the current Pro-CAD system and explained that support and maintenance was in place until March 2024.

During discussion, the Officers answered Members' questions.

Action – ACFRO Jennings to bring a detailed update to the Board after Christmas.

LDC Cookstown Project – Update

The Chairperson informed Members of a recent visit to LDC Cookstown by a Team from DoH. Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings reported positively on their visit.

The Chairperson noted that the Members had already been issued with invitations to visit LDC Cookstown. She recommended that Members take the opportunity to visit the site after Christmas.

Action – ACFRO Jennings to reschedule visit in the New Year.

With respect to the LDC Cookstown project, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings provided a high level overview of progress with respect to Phase 2 of the project highlighting the significant progress. He also updated Members on the business of the LDC Programme Board noting that a full audit of sustainability had been conducted as requested by the NIFRS Board. He stated that a paper will be presented to the next Meeting of the Board.

Board Effectiveness Group

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance updated Members on a meeting of the Group held on 18 November. She explained that a number of priorities have been identified and that an Action Plan is being developed for consideration at the next Group Meeting which will follow after the publication after the HMI Review.

CRMP Project Board

Members were informed that the first meeting of the CRMP Project Board is scheduled for tomorrow.

Action – Board to be kept regularly informed of progress.

Business Case and Pensions Working Groups

Referring to the Business Case Working Group, the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance noted the background to the establishment of the Working Group and explained that the Board Effectiveness Working Group would be considering these Working Groups as part of their work.

With respect to the Pensions Working Group, Members were informed that a meeting of the Pension Board was scheduled for March and that the Pensions Working Group would subsequently be initiated when necessary.

Action – Members to be kept fully apprised of progress.

Item 7: Relevant Correspondence

The following correspondence was noted:

- Letter from the Fire Brigades Union – Notice of Ballot under Section 105 of the Trade Union & Labour Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

Item 8: Documents for Sealing

Members noted the undernoted documents for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

- Eugene Joans Limited – Dungiven Fire Station Refurbishment/Ext and Welfare Works;
- Canavan Construction Limited – Limavady Fire Station Refurbishment.

Item 9: January 2023 Key Dates

A provisional schedule of key dates for January 2023 was noted.

Chairperson drew Members' to the proposed programme for 12 January when it is anticipated Robert Scott will be in a position to present the key areas within the initial draft of the HMI Report.

Mr Craig referred to an email which had been issued with respect to hybrid working and expressed concern that the matter had not been brought through to the Board.

The Director of People & Culture explained the email issued outlined the interim position and outlined the background to same.

Action – The interim arrangements for working from home be presented for discussion, initially through the People & Culture Committee at its February Meeting and onward to the Board.

In a response to a query from Mrs Singleton regarding Motor insurance, the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance outlined the current position with respect to the Business Case for Motor Vehicle Insurance including the legal advice received. She noted that Senior Counsel had been engaged.

Action – update to be provided by HPPG at next Board Meeting in 2023.

Referring to the Minutes which were to be presented for ratification, the Chairperson proposed that these be circulated as per Standing Order 2.6 with any comments to be fed back to the Governance & Business Support Services Advisor. Members agreed.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and the Chairperson extended their best wishes to everyone for Christmas and New Year.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 3.50 PM
