

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

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

12 JANUARY 2023

12.15 PM

PRESENT: Ms C McKinney, Chairperson
Mr A Hearn, Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mr J Craig
Mr C Enright
Mr R Irvine
Mr P Kennedy
Mr J Lennon
Mr J Quinn
Mrs H Singleton
Ms L Smith

APOLOGIES: Ms B Anley
Mr T O'Hanlon

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

Prior to the commencement of business, the Chairperson extended her best wishes for a happy and and prosperous new year.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, expressed her condolences to Robert Scott and his family on the passing of his Mother. She noted herself and Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Hearn had written to Mr Scott on behalf of the Board and the organisation.

Referring to the Board Session scheduled for 30 January, the Chairperson informed the Meeting that this session has been postponed and a new date will be advised as soon as possible.

Item 1: Apologies

Apologies from Members were noted.

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.

Mr Quinn declared an interest with regard to the Industrial Action Update and stated that he would absent from the Meeting for this item. This was noted by the Chairperson.

Item 3: Items for Information

Command & Control Project Update

Members noted a briefing paper providing an update with respect to the Command & Control Mobilising replacement project and specifically the supplier financial position affecting this project.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings gave an overview of the information presented particularly the supplier's financial position noting that the supplier had taken the preventative measure of being placed under the protection of Redressment Judiciaire by the French Court and the impact of this on NIFRS.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings drew Members' attention to a timeline of actions taken by NIFRS to date including legal engagement. He summarised the legal position and explained that NIFRS should be able to terminate the contract with the supplier. He further explained that NIFRS' legal representatives are seeking clarity on a number of points relating to the commercial courts determination. Once clarity on the position is obtained they will provide a legal position for Board consideration setting out the position options and risks associated with those options.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings also updated Members on the project financial position and explained that it is difficult to determine what costs are recoverable. Members noted the position with SFRS and other UKFRSs.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings outlined the position regarding the Command & Control legacy system (ProCAD and ICCS) stating it is believed that there is a low risk to maintaining this system provided that NIFRS is still able to obtain support and maintenance for the legacy equipment. He updated Members on the Business Case to provide support and maintenance for ProCAD which was a priority and would be presented to a future Board meeting. It was also noted that the ICCS support and maintenance arrangements remain in place.

With respect to next steps, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings stressed that today's Briefing Paper was for information only. A decision paper is being prepared for presentation to the Board at a future meeting.

The Chairperson emphasised that no decision was being taken at today's meeting noting that Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings and the Director of Corporate Services are working on a decision paper to be brought to the Board.

During a full discussion, the Officers provided clarification/answered Members' questions relating to aspects of the information presented including the protection of Redressment Judiciaire timelines and its impact on the supplier; the availability of other suppliers; assurances sought regarding timelines/alternatives being explored and the maintenance of the legacy system.

Mrs Singleton stressed the need for clear legal advice on the matter and the need to progress quickly. She outlined her views and issues with respect to the options for moving forward and reiterated that speed and decision-making is of the essence. She sought assurance that NIFRS' legal team is looking at the matter from a broad aspect.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings outlined briefly the substantive legal advice which had been received since the Briefing Paper had been drafted and highlighted that it covered the issues raised by Mrs Singleton. He also responded to Mrs Singleton's points raised with respect to performance issues.

With regard to the maintenance of the legacy system, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings stated that the systems can be maintained but at a significant cost noting that one of the key risks is around affordability.

Mr Irvine concurred with the need to move quickly in the matter. He sought clarification as to whether NIFRS is continuing to work with the supplier or had the contract been suspended. Referring to the decision paper being drafted, Mr Irvine pointed out that a full cost overview, including legal costs, needs to be incorporated along with a critical timeline for options with key milestones. He also pointed out the need for CPD to advise regarding procurement options to be obtained up front.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings stated that NIFRS continues to work with the supplier and noted that a meeting was scheduled with the suppliers that afternoon. He also noted that a lot of the information that Mr Irvine had cited was now available.

Mr Quinn expressed concern regarding the cost and also the feasibility of maintaining the legacy system reminding the Meeting of NIFRS' legal responsibility to make arrangements for dealing with calls. He stated he would welcome hearing from NIFRS legal team on the day to assist with decision-making.

Action: Legal input to brought to the Meeting.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings acknowledged that Command & Control mobilising was essential and stated that he was confident the legacy system could be maintained. The Director of Corporate Services assured Members that options are being explored and work was well underway with PaLS.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings accepted that the next steps were crucial and stated that he would welcome the support of the Board to finalise the decision paper.

The Chairperson acknowledged the level of expertise within the Board to assist and stated that she would discuss this with Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Hearn after the meeting.

Action: iCFRO Hearn to discuss Board assistance through the Chairperson to finalise decision paper.

Change in the Order of Business

The Chairperson suggested a change in the order of business and consider the Business Cases as the next item. This was agreed.

Item 4: Standalone Strategic Items

Business Cases

Business Case for Total Support & Maintenance

Members noted the Executive Summary in respect of the Business Case for Total Support & Maintenance.

The Director of Corporate Services outlined the purpose of the Business Case explaining the need to provide continued support for the current NIFRS Finance, Payroll and Procurement System (Total) for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2027.

The Director of Corporate Services noted the preferred option to put in place a new support and maintenance contract with the incumbent supplier and to continue with current plans to migrate services off MIS. She explained that this option requires a Direct Award Contract (DAC) and that this would also require DoH approval. She stated that the procurement and associated technical tasks for this proposal will be managed by the Head of IT. The Director of Corporate Services sought approval of the Business Case for submission to DoH.

During discussion, Members sought clarification with regard to the DAC position; the 5 year time period for the contract; additional budget requirement; and if there was flexibility to end the contract early.

The Director of Corporate Services provided an explanation of the additional budget requirement noting that the over-arching impact of inflation had been taken in the round as part of the budget build. Referring to the time period she explained that the 5 year time period facilitated the plan to implement a new system within the timeframe of the DAC. She noted work ongoing with the Director of People & Culture with respect to a resource to draft the Business Case for the HR/Finance project. She noted that the replacement of the system was a recommendation from the line of business review which she was happy to share with Members. The Director of Corporate Services advised Members that a VEAT notice will be required.

Mr Irvine expressed concern regarding the potential 5 year timeline for a new system given NIFRS was already 2-3 years into an IT transition strategy and pointed out the need for the rationale for the timeline.

The Chairperson noted the potential impact of the outcome of the HMI review. The Director of Corporate Services to bring any implications through the Service Delivery Committee.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs McKinney, seconded by Ms Smith, unanimously approved the Business Case for Total Support & Maintenance and onward submission of the documentation to DoH for final approval.

Business Case for Sophtlogic Support & Maintenance

The Executive Summary relating to the Business Case for Sophtlogic Support & Maintenance was noted.

The Director of Corporate Services noted the purpose of the Business Case explaining that need to provide continued support for the current NIFRS Management Information System (MIS) for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026.

The Director of Corporate Services noted the preferred option to put in place a new support and maintenance contract with the incumbent supplier and to continue with current plans to migrate services off MIS. She explained that a DAC will also be required for this project and it is expected that DoH approval will be required.

During discussion, Members expressed concern regarding the enhanced costs and the additional financial commitment highlighting the level of financial pressures the organisation is currently managing.

Following further discussion, the Board, on the motion of Mr Lennon, seconded by Mr Kennedy, unanimously approved the Business Case for Sophtlogic Support & Maintenance onward submission of the documentation to DoH for final approval.

Industrial Action Update

At this point,
Mr Quinn left the Meeting (1.50 pm)

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted that the FBU ballot for industrial action closes on 30 January and explained that NIFRS continues to plan in the background as requested by the Board.

At this point,
Mr Enright left the Meeting (1.55 pm)

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members noting that planning continued through the Silver Group and that Officers continued to hold local discussions with FBU officials. Members noted that the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer had met with Matt Wrack to discuss a derogated response position using NIFRS personnel.

At this point,
Mr Lennon left the Meeting (1.58 pm)

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer gave Members a detailed update with respect to progress in relation to engagement with partner agencies including discussions with Cross-Border Services in relation to mutual aid. He commented that additional support is unlikely unless in the event of a serious and imminent risk to life or a major incident. He also updated Members with respect to MACA and explained that the planning around MACA if this was triggered or not.

Referring to corporate communications, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer updated Members on actions to date highlighting that correspondence had been issued to all uniformed personnel. He noted external communications plans were also being developed by way of informing the public.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer referred to the use of internal Resilience Contracts and advised Members of the up-to-date position outlining the legal advice received in relation to 'inducement'. He added that there is high associated costs with this option.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer stated he would keep the Board updated with respect to NJC meetings and the decision with respect to MACA.

The Chairperson acknowledged that there wasn't much information to share but that she felt it was important that Members were aware of the work ongoing in the background. She commended the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer for his work and also the Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer for their professional skills displayed at a fragile time with industrial relations. She also commended them for their work in the background with DoH.

The Chairperson sought clarification regarding the timeline for the ballot; its output and potential strike action.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer advised that a decision regarding NIFRS MACA request would be received on 16 January. He noted that the FBU ballot closes on 30 January and that the result will be known fairly quickly. With respect to strike action, a minimum of 2 weeks' notice is required from the FBU.

The Chairperson noted the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer will keep Board Members informed.

The Director of Corporate Services referred to the correspondence received from DoH regarding 2023/24 resource planning which had been circulated to Members for information. She explained that a meeting was scheduled with DoH for 17 February to discuss same and that proposals will be brought to the Board in due course.

Mrs Singleton stressed the need for discussions to be balanced with the HMI inspection outcome and the Board's expectations that HMI outcomes will be funded.

The Chairperson noted previous discussions with the HMI Chief Inspector and his team in relation to funding.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their contribution and also the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and his Team for their work.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 2.10 PM
