

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

25 APRIL 2023

1.40 PM

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

APOLOGIES: Mr C Enright
Mr T O'Hanlon
Mr J Quinn

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Harper, Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
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 K McKenna, DoH Observer (*virtual*)

The Chairperson welcomed everyone to the Meeting, in particular Mrs McKenna, DoH Observer.

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. There were no apparent conflicts of interest declared.

Item 3: Minutes of Board Meetings

28 February 2023

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 February 2023, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and agreed as an accurate record, subject to a minor amendment, on the motion of Mr Enright, seconded by Ms Smith.

Item 4: Standalone Strategic Items

Standing Order 2.6 – Urgent/Emergent Issues

Under Standing Order 2.6, Members unanimously adopted the undernoted recommendations emanating from the Remuneration Committee Meeting of 29 March:

- Approval of the Pay Remit for Wholetime; On-Call; and RCC Personnel for the period 1 July 2022 to 30 June 2023 and submission of the documentation to DoH;
- Approval of the Pay Remit for Wholetime; On-Call; and RCC Personnel for the period 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024 and submission of the documentation to DoH subject to the affordability caveat;
- Approval of a low-value payment in lieu of TOIL which has been confirmed as affordable in year, along with a request that a review of the Overtime Policy be completed as soon as possible;
- Approval of uplift in the grade of 2 roles which were re-evaluated in line with Organisational Change Policy.

The Board, on the motion of Ms McKinney, seconded by Mr Kennedy, unanimously agreed to retrospectively approve the above.

Finance Report

The Director of Corporate Services updated Members on the year-end position noting that there was no Finance Report as figures are still being finalised.

The Director of Corporate Services informed Members that NIFRS has achieved a breakeven position at year-end subject to audit. She provided a high level summary of the Revenue budget year-end position.

Referring to the Capital budget, the Director of Corporate Services explained that, unlike the Revenue budget, there is no specific breakeven target set for the budget by DoH – the target is to align as closely as possible to budget. She informed Members of an additional easement of £700k which had been surrendered to DoH and provided an explanation for the easement. Members noted the explanation.

The Director of Corporate Services reported positively with respect to Prompt Payment compliance highlighting that 99% of bills had been paid within 30 days.

The Director of Corporate Services stated that brief Finance Report was being prepared which she would be content to share after the Meeting. This was agreed by Members as necessary for completeness.

Action: Director of Corporate Services to circulate Finance Report as soon as possible with Capital budget upate to be strengthened

Capital Delegation Memo – ALBs

Members noted correspondence from DoH relating to a review of internal capital delegations.

The Director of Corporate Services gave a brief overview of the increase in delegated limits. She noted the additional challenges presented by the change in approach by the Department, noting the current position with respect to an Economic Adviser role within NIFRS, the management of Business Cases and the delegation of approvals.

The Director of Corporate Services stated the need to revisit the Members' view on establishing a Business Case Committee to look at the Business Case process and consider how that Committee would feed into the Board. Members agreed this would be part of the deliberations post the HMI inspection and they would defer to the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance to assist.

In the interim, the Director of Corporate Services referred to Business Cases for approval within the Board's remit and proposed that the full Business Case be presented to the Service Delivery Committee for consideration and potential approval. Mr Irvine, Chairperson of the Service Delivery Committee, was asked his view.

Mr Irvine stated he was content for the Committee to take on the remit to scrutinise Business Cases in the short term.

Referring to the delegated limits, Mrs Singleton stated her view that there should be a collaborative approach noting the responsibility to develop high quality Business Cases. She added that the absence of an Economic Advisor may diminish the quality of Business Cases and potentially result in the adjustment of delegated limits.

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Ms McKinney, unanimously agreed that, on an interim basis, Business Cases within the Board's remit for approval be presented to the Service Delivery Committee for consideration and approval.

Partnership Agreement

The Chairperson noted the discussion at that morning's information session relating to the Partnership Agreement.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted and welcomed the comments relating to the co-design and implementation of the Agreement and stated that he will continue to emphasise to DoH the need to develop the Partnership Agreement in conjunction with the Board. Members agreed.

Command & Control Project Update

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings updated Members on the current position in respect of the Command & Control project advising that, on 13 March 2023, the Notice of Termination had been served due to the supplier termination event having occurred. All necessary steps under the contract have been met and the termination took effect on 14 March 2023. He stated that indications were that the exit would not be challenged, however, he stated if that changed he would come back to the Board promptly.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings outlined the 4 key areas going forward –

- Support and maintenance of the current system;
- The development of a new Business Case – this has been progressed but has been impacted by the retirement of the Project Manager;
- Procurement and route to market – he gave a brief overview of discussions/engagement with other FRSs to identify other frameworks. He also explained the position in relation to Procurement in an Emergency through Clause 32(c) of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, which provides for an option of Direct Award Contracts, however, he noted the Board's position regarding same.
- Contract exit – conscious of potential timeframes.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings advise Members that Ops Comms/RCC now sits under Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney's Directorate but that he will continue to assist with the project.

In response to questions from Members regarding the impact of the situation on the current Command & Control system, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer stated that with the incumbent system having the extended support and maintenance he was content with the current position whilst exiting the contract. However, he stressed the need to move quickly to progress a new contract.

Members enquired around timelines for a decision regarding procurement and the Officers stated that the organisation will move as quickly as possible on the decision around the route to procurement, however, the potential delay would be in respect of Business Case approval.

Action: Members asked for regular updates.

Mrs Singleton requested that, if the decision is to move with a Direct Award Contract, that the learning from the DAC Audit be taken on board. Members agreed.

Action: Audit, Risk & Governance Committee and the Board to be provided with a lessons learned briefing paper.

Installation of Defibrillators on NIFRS Stations

Members noted a Briefing Paper relating to the on the installation of Defibrillators (AEDs) on all NIFRS Fire Stations for public use.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings outlined the background to the initiative explaining that a Business Case was developed and approved to provide AEDs at every Fire Station across Northern Ireland with the project being delivered for a period of 10 years. He explained that given the locations and public access to Stations, NIFRS is best placed among the public services to support the introduction and maintenance of public use AEDs. The installation of this life saving equipment will enhance the availability of initial emergency equipment necessary in the event of a cardiac arrest.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings informed Members that Operational Delivery Directorate was working with the Facilities & Assets Department to facilitate the fitting of the AEDs highlighting that installation on Stations had commenced. He stated that the installation of the AEDs is expected to take up to 3 months.

He noted that a media launch to ensure the public is aware that AEDs are available at their local Fire Stations is planned to coincide with 'Start a Heart Day' in September. In the interim some of the equipment has already been fitted and guidance issued.

In response to a question from Ms Smith relating to precarious liability, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings stated that he did not believe there was any liability and explained how the AEDs will be accessed by the public. He also highlighted that the FBU is 'on board' and that in accordance with NIFRS policy 80% of Firefighters have been trained as first responders.

Mr Irvine referred to the project time span and suggested that it would have been useful to include the spend profile as it extends to 10 years.

The Director of Corporate Services suggested that this be included in the capital spend summary within the Finance Report. This was agreed.

Action: Director of Corporate Services to include capital spend profile pertaining to AEDs in Finance Report

Safe Place Initiative

A Briefing Paper pertaining to the introduction of the Safe Place Initiative on NIFRS Fire Stations.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings gave an overview of the background to the initiative explaining that the Safe Place initiative provides support for people requiring information about domestic abuse. He added that as an organisation NIFRS regards the safety of the public and its employees to be of paramount importance and welcomed the opportunity to support this campaign.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings pointed out that the Safe Place Initiative is primarily for information sharing and signposting people affected by domestic abuse. He stated that in the event of a member of the public seeking help at any NIFRS site, where there is a concern for their immediate safety, NIFRS safeguarding reporting procedures would be implemented. He noted the literature which will be issued to all sites.

Members welcomed NIFRS signing up to the Workplace Charter on Domestic Abuse and introducing the Safe Place Initiative as a positive means to support the local community.

Referring to safeguarding, the Chairperson suggested the need for a Member of the Board to be designated as a Safeguarding person. This role would require additional training for the Member.

During discussion, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings answered Members' questions relating to safeguarding, designated Safeguarding Officers and the procedures at Stations. He informed Members that with respect to its Safeguarding policy and procedures NIFRS was viewed as best practice.

The Chairperson referred to the cultural piece pertaining to safeguarding and enquired as to how many reports of abuse, sexual assault, etc, had been recorded within NIFRS. She stressed the importance of the People & Culture Committee considering this issue.

Action: People & Culture Committee to receive a detailed breakdown on the above for information and discussion. Committee Chairperson and Director of People & Culture to take forward as soon as practicable.

The Chairperson stated that as a former Vice-Chair of the Safeguarding Board she very much welcomed the introduction of the Initiative within NIFRS. She noted that whilst the People & Culture Committee has a role, safeguarding is a whole Board priority.

The Chairperson also noted that she had ready had discussions with Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings and would further liaise with him to confirm her nominee.

Action: Chairperson to liaise with ACFRO Jennings with a view to bringing forward the nomination for Board approval at the June Meeting.

Performance Management

Members noted the Performance Management Updates for the period up to 31 December 2022 including the Performance Reports from each of the Standing Committees.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance referred to the reporting period for the Reports explaining same had been deferred from the last Board Meeting. She advised Members that the year-end Performance Reports were currently being collated.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance provided a high level overview of the progress as at 31 December noting slippage beyond the planning year had occurred in respect of 8 tasks. She gave brief overview of the areas of slippage highlighting that resources was a common theme. This was noted by Members.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance noted the key achievements in-year to date.

The Chairperson referred to the Pensions Board and sought an update on progress.

The Director of Corporate Services noted that the inaugural meeting of the Pensions Board had taken place in March and gave a brief overview of the business discussed. The Chairperson asked for regular updates as work progressed.

Referring to the position with regard to the Programme Management role, the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer explained that SIB had been engaged to scope out what the Organisation's need may be. Members noted this and asked to be kept fully informed and noted the potential associated cost.

Property Asset Management Plan

NIFRS Property Asset Management Plan 2022/23-2027/28 was noted.

The Director of Corporate Services gave a brief explanation as to the purpose of the Plan which is aligned to the Business Plan, Estate Strategy, Savings Plan and Budget. She noted that the Plan was being presented to the Board for information.

The Director of Corporate Services provided a synopsis of the key points within the Executive Summary drawing attention to performance against KPIs; the works and/or develop business cases for which commencement is planned within the next 5 year period; and the position with respect to backlog maintenance.

Mr Irvine referred to previous discussion regarding the Antrim Station replacement and future viability of going forward in the absence of CRMP and reiterated the need for a proper capital build matrix to be available as check box to ensure NIFRS does not progress the replacement of an asset which may not be required in the future. He commented that an outcome of the CRMP may direct resources going forward.

Mrs Singleton noted that the Head of Facilities & Assets is a member of the CRMP Programme Board and commended the team for their balanced approach. She referred to discussions with NIAS regarding the Boucher site. She highlighted the impact of the cost of Boucher on the budget and stressed the need for this issue to be resolved pointing out the need for a decision at Departmental level to enable NIFRS to move forward.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings informed Members of planned engagement with NIAS and DoH in May to agree a clear timeframe to deal with the issue and progress same.

Action: Update to be presented to the Board at its June Meeting.

Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson informed the Meeting that Michele Larmour had been appointed Chairperson of the NI Ambulance Service noting she had written to Michele extending best wishes and hoped to meet her in the future.

The Chairperson noted that she had commenced one-to-one conversations with Members reviewing the last 12 months.

Item 6: Reports from Board Committees, Noting of Committee Minute and Adoption of Committee Recommendations

People & Culture Committee – Minutes – 21 September 2022

The Minutes of the People & Culture Committee Meeting held on 21 September 2022 were noted.

People & Culture Committee – Meeting – 20 March 2023

Members noted that a Meeting of the People & Culture Committee had been held on 20 March 2023 and the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at a future Meeting of the Board.

Ms Smith, Chairperson of the People & Culture Committee, provided a brief overview of the business discussed at the Meeting.

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mr Kennedy, adopted the following recommendations emanating from the Meeting.

People & Culture Committee – Recommendations

- Approval of NIFRS Menopause Policy;
- Approval of NIFRS Work Related Stress Policy.

Remuneration Committee - Minutes – 26 April 2022

The Minutes of the Remuneration Committee Meeting held on 26 April 2022 were noted. Members further noted that the recommendations contained therein had been adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 30 August 2022.

Remuneration Committee - Minutes – 30 August 2022

The Minutes of the Remuneration Committee Meeting held on 30 August 2022 were noted. Members also noted that the recommendations contained therein had been adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 30 August 2022.

Remuneration Committee - Minutes – 28 February 2023

The Minutes of the Remuneration Committee Meeting held on 28 February 2023 were noted. Members also noted that the recommendations contained therein had been adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 28 February 2023.

Item 7: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 8: Documents for Sealing

Members noted the following document for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

McAdam Design Limited – New Cushendall Fire Station.

Item 9: May/June 2023 Key Dates

A provisional schedule of key dates for May/June 2023 was noted.

The Chairperson explained that it may be necessary to convene the Board on other dates. She further explained that the Training Schedule for the next year was currently being developed noting that Fraud Training for Members is provisionally scheduled for June.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 2.45 PM
