

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

26 SEPTEMBER 2023

3.45 PM

PRESENT: Mr J Colville, Chairperson
Mr A Hearn, Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mr P Kennedy
Mr J Lennon
Mr T O'Hanlon (*virtual*)
Mrs H Singleton
Ms L Smith

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr P Harper, Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mr A Jennings, 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

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

27 June 2023

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 June 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 Ms Smith, seconded by Mr Kennedy.

Arising out of the Minutes:

National Operational Guidance (NOG) Alignment Project – Resource Requirement Proposal

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer referred to the discussions at the People & Culture Committee and had hoped to discuss it further this morning at the Workshop and provide further details.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted the detail required in relation to overtime costs and noted the information provided at the Workshop regarding the need to stabilise the organisation's headcount. He explained the difficulties for the Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer in obtaining the requirements to assist to determine a Service Delivery Model but noted that work was ongoing to address same. He stated he was hopeful that the presentations provided the further information required by the Board on the Resource Requirement for the NOG Alignment Project reiterating the proposal used the redeployment of existing personnel.

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mr Lennon, unanimously agreed to approve the National Operational Guidance (NOG) Alignment Project Resource Requirement Proposal.

Restructuring Proposals

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer provided an explanation of the background to the restructuring proposals and noting discussions regarding the proposals.

Ms Smith explained why she felt the posts should proceed given they were critical going forward.

The Board on the motion of Mr Kennedy, seconded by Mrs Singleton unanimously approved the posts of Assistant Director (Service Improvement) and Assistant Director (IT).

Item 4: Standalone Strategic Items HMFSI Action Plan

Members noted a detailed Action Plan which had been developed following receipt of the HMFSI (Scotland) Inspection Report on 7 September 2023. The Plan had been developed to reflect the 11 recommendations made within the Report.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted a presentation outlining a detailed Action Plan for the consideration of the Board and subsequently DoH and the HMI Fire Service Inspectorate (Scotland). He noted that there are 11 recommendations emanating from the Report.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer referred to the underlining theme within the Report relating to communications with the organisation and stated that ELT had given itself a further recommendation and were suggesting that a review of Corporate Communications should be included also within the Action Plan.

He stated that the High Level Action Plan had been further refined with an underpinning task list assigned to a Lead Officer for completion by a set date. He explained that the task list had been cross referenced to existing internal/external audit recommendations to ensure all related organisation requirements are captured, eg, LFB Cultural Review. He highlighted that the tasks have been prioritised and timelines allocated.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer stressed that the implementation of the recommendations will require DoH support in terms of resources and investment. He also referred to the discussions at the Workshop with regard to resources which will feed into Working Groups.

The Chairperson acknowledged the further work necessary and agreed the need for further Workshops involving the Board, ELT and DoH. He stated the core material was there and now needed to be taken forward.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer had undertaken to report back how the Action Plan will be taken forward and explained that it will be taken forward into the Business Improvement Plan.

In response to a query from Mrs Singleton regarding the possibility of accelerating the timelines relating to LDC Cookstown, the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer explained that the Plan was a transitional plan and that a further Workshop was imminent.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings provided a further explanation noting the potential to accelerate the timeline.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted other elements for consideration within the Report, eg, On Call Working Group; Job & Grading Review; draft Partnership Agreement. He provided an overview of the next steps noting that the Plan, subject to Board approval, will be submitted to DoH to share with HMI (Scotland). He further noted the need to agree oversight arrangements with the Board and DoH/HMI follow-up protocols.

In response to questions from Members regarding the possibility of follow-up inspections, Mrs Montgomery stated that DoH will have discussions with HMI and then feedback to the Board.

Ms Smith explained that she felt the need to revisit the Plan further as there were no assumption re resources and stressed the need for this further detail relating to actual resourcing needs in order for DoH to consider. The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted this.

ACTION: iCFRO to consider Members' comments and adjust the Action Plan.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Lennon, seconded by Mr Kennedy, unanimously approved the HMFSI Detailed Action Plan.

2022/23 Board Governance Self-Assessment

Members noted the 2022/23 Board Governance Self-Assessment.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that the document had been considered in detail by the Chairperson and also noted the recommendations contained within. She also noted that due to the timing of the self-assessment some of the recommendations have been closed.

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mr Lennon, unanimously agreed to approve the 2022/23 Board Governance Self-Assessment subject to amendment.

2022/23 AR&GC Self-Assessment

Members noted the Audit, Risk & Governance Self-Assessment 2022/23.

Mr Kennedy, Chairperson of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, gave a brief overview of the assessment. He explained that there were 2 emerging risks relating to training and that this would be arranged for the full Board.

2022/23 AR&GC Annual Report to the Board

The 2022/23 Annual Report of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee was noted.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance provided an explanation of the information presented which related to the activity of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee during 2022/23. She noted that based on the work undertaken BSO Internal Audit in 2022/23, it had provided limited assurance.

With regard to the Annual Report & Accounts, the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance noted that the Audit Report from NIAO is an unqualified opinion. She noted the current position with regard to the Accounts and stated that it is hoped that the Accounts will be signed off soon.

With respect to audit assignments, she noted that 2 audits had been deferred – the Audit of Payroll had been postponed at the request of Internal Audit due to capacity issues; and also the Audit of Board Effectiveness, however, this Audit had now commenced.

ACTION: Minor amendment noted – HPPG to follow-up.

Finance Report

Members noted the Finance Report updating Members on the finance period for the period ended 31 August 2023.

The Director of Corporate Services noted the challenge for the Service to achieve a balanced budget. She highlighted the current position with respect to unmitigated overhead pressures to the value of £3m of which NIFRS is committed to covering £0.9m. She informed Members that DoH has indicated, subject to approval from the Permanent Secretary, additional funding of circa £1.8m. She pointed out that this additional funding was not recurrent. She stated that discussions will continue with DoH with regard to unpredicted pressures.

The Director of Corporate Services informed Members of an emergent issue pertaining to the risk of costs of the IT staff TUPE materialising in-year as the process to migrate staff pensions is in the final stages. She added there is a level of uncertainty for the timing and explained the background to the issue and the delay. She further explained that the delay had resulted in a decrease in costs. She stated the organisation will be unaware of final costs until the process is complete and that DoH was aware of the situation.

Referring to the Revenue Budget, the Director of Corporate Services noted the financial performance to date which reflects an underspend and provided an explanation. She further noted that no pay award had been agreed for Support Staff as yet and therefore there was no accrual to date due to the uncertainty at this stage. She advised Members that DoH have provided support for the Pay Award for Operational staff.

With respect to the Capital budget, the Director of Corporate Services noted the current position and advised Members that plans were in place to spend the full allocation.

The Director of Corporate Services reported positively with respect to Prompt Payment compliance and noted the current position with regard to Business Case approvals.

The Director of Corporate Services provided further explanations/answered Members' questions relating to the information presented. Members welcomed the support of DoH and the contribution to budget easements.

Crew and Payment System (CAPS) Project

Members noted that, in light of ongoing concerns with regard to the Contractor for the Crew and Payment System (CAPS) project, the Chairperson of the Service Delivery Committee had requested that the current Status Report be escalated to the Board.

The Director of Corporate Services explained next steps will include the development of a Decision Paper which will address Board concerns.

ACTION: DoCS to prepare a Decision Paper for the consideration of the Board.

NIFRS Pension Board

A copy of the Terms of Reference for the NIFRS Pension Board, circulated for the information of Members, was noted.

Scheme of Delegated Authority – Approval of Business Cases

The Director of Corporate Services explained that, following the change in capital delegations to £5m, there was a need to review the level of delegation from the Board to ELT for the approval of Business Cases and management of Business Cases that require Board approval.

The Director of Corporate Services outlined the current position with respect to the delegated limits for capital projects and provided a detailed explanation of the new/proposed delegated limits for capital and IT projects. She advised Members that with the increased delegated limits there will be increased test drilling by DoH.

Members stressed the need for assurances and the Director of Corporate Services proposed that any approvals are reported to the Board. **This was agreed.**

The Board, on the motion of Mr Kennedy, seconded by Ms Smith, agreed to approve the new Capital Delegated Authority limits for Capital and IT projects.

Item 5: Chairperson's Business

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Board, extended condolences to Ms Anley following the death of her Mother.

Referring to the Workshop that morning, the Chairperson stated he looked forward to establishing Working Groups and progressing work as indicated this morning noting that this will also include DoH.

He noted that Fire Safety Week was taking place 9-13 October and that he hoped Members were available to attend some of the events during the week.

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

Service Delivery Committee – Meeting – 20 September 2023

Members noted that a Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee had been held on 20 September 2023 and the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at a future Meeting of the Board.

Mrs Singleton, Chairperson of the Service Delivery Committee, gave a brief synopsis of the business discussed at the Meeting including a draft NIFRS False Alarm Policy detailing NIFRS protocols for the effective management of Automatic Fire Alarms (AFAs) and National Operational Guidance (NOG) Project Implementation Plan. She explained that further detail on the 3 year Plan had been requested and would be presented to the Board in due course.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Lennon, seconded by Ms Smith, unanimously agreed to adopt the following recommendation emanating from the Meeting.

Service Delivery Committee – Recommendation

- **Approval of draft False Alarm Policy.**

People & Culture Committee – Meeting – 20 September 2023

Members noted that a Meeting of the People & Culture Committee had been held on 20 September 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 an overview of the business discussed at the Meeting which included attendance management; resourcing update; Student Placement Pilot; and amended Temporary Promotions Agreement.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance and Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings provided a further explanation of the background to the review of the Temporary Promotions Agreement and the proposed amendments.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs Singleton, seconded by Mr Colville, unanimously agreed to adopt the undernoted recommendations emanating from the Meeting.

People & Culture Committee - Recommendations

- **Approval of proposed implementation of a Student Placement Pilot within NIFRS Corporate Communications Department; and**
- **Amendment of Temporary Promotions Agreement.**

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 21 September 2023

Members noted that a Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee had been held on 21 September 2023 and the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at a future Meeting of the Board.

Mr Kennedy, Chairperson of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, gave an overview of the business discussed at the Meeting. He updated Members on the current position with respect to NIFRS Annual Report and Statement of Accounts explaining that it was hoped to have the Accounts closed off this week and the Report subsequently laid in the Assembly.

Referring to the Internal Audit Reports, Mr Kennedy noted that with respect to the audit of On Call 7 Day Critical Training, Internal Audit had provided 'unacceptable' assurance. He outlined the recommendations from the Audit and stressed that the Committee will be closely monitoring this matter.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer expressed his disappointment with regard to the assurance given highlighting that ELT had drew attention to the need for an audit in this area. He explained that the documentation presented to Internal Audit may have been incorrect and that a meeting was being held with Internal Audit to discuss this further. He undertook to keep Members informed.

ACTION: iCFRO to keep Members updated on discussions with Internal Audit in relation to the Audit of On Call 7 Day Critical Training.

Members agreed to defer adoption of the Audit of On Call 7 Day Critical Training until the outcome of the discussions with Internal Audit.

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mrs Singleton, unanimously agreed to adopt the undernoted recommendations emanating from the Meeting.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee - Recommendations

- **Acceptance of the Audit of Claims Management; and**
- **Updated Internal Audit Charter.**

Remuneration Committee Meeting – 21 September 2023

Members noted that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee had been held on 21 September 2023 and the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at a future Meeting of the Board.

The Chairperson noted the business at the Meeting was to consider the Pay Remit for the Operational Directors.

The Board on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Mr Kennedy, unanimously agreed to adopt the undernoted recommendation emanating from the Meeting.

Remuneration Committee – Recommendation

- **To approve the Operational Directors' Pay Remit for the period 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023 and onward submission of the documentation to DoH for final approval.**

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 –

Telefonica UK Limited – ECC Code of Agreement & Deed of Surrender –
Telecommunications Mast at Whitla Fire Station.

Item 9: October/November 2023 Key Dates

A provisional schedule of key dates for October/November 2023 was noted.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 5.14 PM
