

# **NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD**

## **MINUTES OF A MEETING**

**28 NOVEMBER 2023**

**2.00 PM**

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

**APOLOGIES:** Mr R Irvine

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr P Harper, Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer  
Mr A Jennings, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer  
Mrs P White, Director of Finance & Support Services  
Mrs T Ramsay, Director of People & Culture  
Miss D Reynolds, Head of Planning, Performance & Governance  
Miss A Maguire, Personal Assistant  
Mrs L'V Montgomery, DoH Observer  
Ms A Flanagan, DoH Observer  
Mr C Young, BSO Internal Audit 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**

#### **26 September 2023**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 September 2023, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and agreed as an accurate record, on the motion of Mr Lennon, seconded by Ms Smith.

## **Change in the Order of Business**

The Chairperson proposed that Item 6 – Reports from Board Committees, Noting of Committee Minutes and Adoption of Committee Recommendations – be taken as the next Item of Business. Members agreed.

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

#### **People & Culture Committee – Minutes – 20 March 2023**

The Minutes of the People & Culture Committee Meeting held on 20 March 2023 were noted. Members further noted that the recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 25 April 2023.

#### **People & Culture Committee – Minutes – 26 June 2023**

The Minutes of the People & Culture Committee Meeting held on 26 June 2023 were noted. Members further noted that the recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 27 June 2023, with the exception of the NOG Alignment Project – Resource Requirement proposal, which was then adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 26 September 2023 following receipt of further information around costings.

#### **People & Culture Committee – Meeting – 22 November 2023**

Members noted that a Meeting of the People & Culture Committee had been held on 22 November 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 Wholetime Operational Transfer Policy.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings provided an overview of the significant changes within the Policy.

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

#### ***People & Culture Committee - Recommendation***

- **Approval of the Wholetime Operational Transfer Policy.**

#### **Service Delivery Committee – Minutes – 15 June 2023**

The Minutes of the Service Delivery Committee Meeting held on 15 June 2023 were noted. Members further noted that the recommendation contained therein was adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 27 June 2023.

### **Service Delivery Committee – Meeting – 22 November 2023**

Members noted that a Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee had been held on 22 November 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 Grenfell Report; Risk Critical Information; and NOG Alignment Rationale Report.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer provided an overview of the NOG Alignment Rationale Report which had been presented to the Service Delivery Committee including delivery mechanism; timelines have been updated to reflect resources; and reflects a risk based approach.

The Chairperson acknowledged that NOG Alignment is a key feature within the HMFSI Report.

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

#### ***Service Delivery Committee - Recommendation***

- **Endorsement of the NOG Alignment Rationale Report.**

### **Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 28 June 2022**

The Minutes of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Meeting held on 28 June 2022 were noted. Members further noted that the recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 30 August 2022.

### **Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 15 June 2023**

The Minutes of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Meeting held on 15 June 2023 were noted. Members further noted that the recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 27 June 2023.

### **Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Minutes – 27 June 2023**

The Minutes of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Meeting held on 27 June 2023 were noted. Members further noted that the recommendation contained therein was adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 27 June 2023.

### **Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 23 November 2023**

Members noted that a Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee had been held on 23 November 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.

Mr Kennedy referred to the 2023/24 Audit Plan Progress Report and noted that following the last Board meeting, Management had engaged with Internal Audit regarding an inaccuracy within the initial report. Members noted the process had been reviewed and whilst the incorrect reference was amended, there was no amendment required to findings or assurance levels. An addendum was added to the report which was re-presented at the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Meeting on 23 November. There was no amendment made to the overarching assurance provided for this report.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer outlined that an Action Plan around On-Call 7 day critical training would be developed by Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney.

Ms Reynolds outlined that a meeting with Ms McKeown (Internal Audit) would be held around the Priority 1 recommendations emanating from the On-Call 7 day critical training audit, which would determine the direction of travel.

Mr Kennedy provided an overview with respect to other items of business discussed, including audit of Information Management – satisfactory level of assurance noted; Internal Audit Mid-Year Follow-up Report 2023/24; Business Improvement Projects; Risk Register - Board Risk Register Workshop to be held in February 2024; and Governance Document Review Update – significant improvement noted.

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

#### ***Audit, Risk & Governance Committee - Recommendations***

- **2023/24 Audit Plan Progress Report incorporating:**
  - **On-Call 7 Day Critical Training – Update; and**
  - **Information Management; and**
- **Mid-Year Follow-up Report 2023/24.**

#### **Remuneration Committee - Minutes – 29 March 2023**

The Minutes of the Remuneration Committee Meeting held on 29 March 2023 were noted. Members further noted that the recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 25 April 2023.

#### **Remuneration Committee - Meeting – 28 November 2023**

Members noted that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee had been held on 28 November 2023 and the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at a future Meeting of the Board.

The Director of People & Culture noted the business at the Meeting was to consider a briefing paper around the Job Evaluation of 12 Support staff roles.

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

***Remuneration Committee – Recommendations***

- Approval of the re-graded roles which have been formally job evaluated in line with current policy;
- Approval of job evaluation outcomes of new posts to support progression of recruitment; and
- Approval to proceed with the job matching process that is extant in current policy, namely Organisational Change Policy, and on a temporary basis until formal approval is sought from the Department of Health for the amendment to grade.

**Joint Negotiating Committee - Meeting – 14 September 2023**

Members noted that a Meeting of the Joint Negotiating Committee had been held on 14 September 2023 and the Minutes of the Meeting will be presented at a future Meeting of the Board. There were no recommendations emanating from the Meeting.

**Item 3: Minutes of Board Meetings**

**26 September 2023**

Arising out of the Minutes:

**Audit of On-Call 7 Day Critical Training**

This matter was discussed under Item 6 - Reports from Board Committees, Noting of Committee Minutes and Adoption of Committee Recommendations – Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 23 November 2024.

**Crew and Payment System (CAPS) Project**

The Director of Finance & Support Services outlined the purpose of the briefing paper is to provide an update to Members on the project, specifically the supplier position affecting the project, and to also seek an approved direction of travel.

The Director of Finance & Support Services outlined the background and noted following a BSO Internal Audit of Payroll in 2019, a number of recommendations were made. To address the recommendations out of the audit, a Business Case was submitted and approved by DoH to procure and implement a Time and Attendance system for On-Call staff, removing the reliance on paper processes; to procure and implement a Crewing system for Wholetime staff, removing the manual processes for the Response Planning Unit; and to re-procure the contract for On-Call Availability. The CAPS Project Delivery Team was subsequently put in place with effect from 4 January 2022.

The Director of Finance & Support Services gave an overview of the procurement and contract award including the role and responsibilities of HTE/Insight. Members noted significant delays in the procurement process with Insight, which elongated the project timelines. They further noted in April 2023, NIFRS submitted a written complaint to HTE with regard to Insight's performance; this was followed up by a meeting in May 2023. HTE has since advised that Insight senior management have completed an investigation into the complaint, but to date NIFRS has not received any feedback, despite numerous follow-up requests.

The Director of Finance & Support Services outlined that HTE and Insight have proven to be challenging in terms of communication and engagement. She stated that following persistence by NIFRS, a further meeting with Insight took place on 2 October 2023, facilitated by HTE, however this meeting primarily focused on the current challenges NIFRS is experiencing in relation to Gartan's non-delivery and significant shift from their tender return. It was noted that Insight was clearly surprised by this and acknowledged Insight had not performed as expected with regard to their due diligence role in delivering against the specification. Insight also agreed that the changes being presented by Gartan were unreasonable and committed to investigate further, providing NIFRS with a response regarding the contractual position and potential next steps by 16 October 2023.

The Director of Finance & Support Services outlined that as of 22 November 2023, no response has been received from Insight, despite NIFRS requests for an update on 17 and 30 October and again on 21 November. She stated that NIFRS has expressed disappointment in the continued lack of meaningful engagement from Insight and has highlighted concerns regarding the way forward.

The Director of Finance & Support Services outlined that NIFRS specification requirements formed part of the contract and Gartan were furnished with a copy of the specification requirements in May 2022 on which to base their proposal. After contract signing in February 2023 Gartan failed to produce a project plan, despite numerous requests and advised analysis was ongoing.

Members noted that in July 2023 Gartan advised that they could not fulfil the contract and proposed a phased approach, which would initially implement the 3 modules without the Administrative functionality outlined in the contract. A second phase would complete the requirements.

The Director of Finance & Support Services outlined that in September 2023 NIFRS finally received an indicative Project Plan for Phase 1, showing all modules live by April 2025, based on a January 2024 start date. Phase 2 is noted to commence in July 2025, with an indicative completion date of July 2027.

Members noted there are 2 aspects to the costing – standard functionality and customisation. Standard functionality remains as initially indicated, subject to standard inflationary increases. The challenge presents from the customisation aspect. Customisation is required largely to provide NIFRS with administrative rights to make business-as-usual changes to configuration. In the absence of the requested functionality NIFRS is wholly reliant on Gartan for such change requests and subject to their timelines and whether it fits in with their development roadmap.

Members further noted the number of customisation hours in the revised proposal is circa 435% higher than those included in the contract which translates into costs that are circa 342% higher than those included in the contract. It was noted there is a clause in the Gartan product contract that potentially enables them to increase pricing in this way.

Members noted that NIFRS has a Direct Award Contract with Gartan for 3 years for the provision of its existing On-Call Availability module. Year 1 covers 2023 and there are 2 further extension options to cover 2024 and 2025. The Head of IT has engaged with Gartan to secure an extension for 2024 and this has now been invoiced and paid.

The Director of Finance & Support Services highlighted there is a potential risk in relation to Gartan continuing with contract extensions for 2025 should NIFRS take a change in direction that does not include the Gartan system.

The Director of Finance & Support Services gave an overview of the financial position.

Members noted the timelines and noted that these are now significantly longer than previously indicated by Gartan.

The Director of Finance & Support Services highlighted Legal advice was sought from Arthur Cox Solicitors to provide an initial high-level overview of the contractual position. She outlined that the advice received outlines options and risks and states in the conclusion that there is a level of ambiguity over the terms of the contract and that ultimately how NIFRS wishes to proceed is a commercial decision based on the risks and appetite to these. The Director of Finance & Support Services gave an overview of the options as per the legal guidance provided.

The Director of Finance & Support Services outlined that DoH has been made aware of the potential issue with the Business Case and the risk of a failed procurement. Members noted the options with respect to the Business Case including implications and risks.

Members noted the recommendation for approval of the following actions to be taken concurrently:

- NIFRS to formally notify Insight that it considers the contract to be untenable and the intention to terminate the contract at no expense to NIFRS.
- NIFRS to progress the necessary governance to take forward an alternative solution.
- NIFRS to finalise a review of potential alternative systems and explore procurement options.

The Director of Finance & Support Services answered Members' queries on the information presented.

Members confirmed they were content with the approach, subject to seeking early legal advice from commercial Solicitors; management of the risks; and ensuring the specification is correct for an alternative system.

**The Board, on the motion of Mr Lennon, seconded by Mr Kennedy, unanimously approved the recommendations with respect to the Crew and Payment System (CAPS) Project - for NIFRS to formally notify Insight that it considers the contract to be untenable and the intention to terminate the contract at no expense to NIFRS; for NIFRS to progress the necessary governance to seek approvals for the preferred option; and for NIFRS to finalise a review of potential alternative systems and explore procurement options.**

#### **Item 4: Standalone Strategic Items HMFSI Action Plan**

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer outlined the consultation process on the HMFSI Action Plan is now complete and noted that positive engagement took place with a number of employees across the Organisation and with the Representative Bodies.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer highlighted comments have been received from the Fire Brigades' Union and DoH which have been factored into the Action Plan.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer outlined that HMFSI Action Plan is a standing agenda item at Executive Leadership Team meetings and the Action Plan would be reviewed on a bi-monthly basis.

Members noted that a Board Task & Finish Group had been set up to scrutinise resourcing levels, and a paper would be presented to the full Board in January/February 2024.

#### **Finance Report**

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

The Director of Finance & Support Services reported that in-year slippage, primarily in On-Call attendance and training, creates a year to date position that could potentially mean that the residual pressure could be manageable within current allocations. She noted this would be kept under review.

The Director of Finance & Support Services gave an overview of the revenue performance and noted that the Support staff pay award has now been agreed and the pay remit is being drafted.

The Director of Finance & Support Services noted a challenge with respect to budget and headcount.

The Director of Finance & Support Services provided an update with respect to the capital budget and noted challenges with budget across all ALBs. She noted that the Command & Control project is creating significant risk for the capital budget.



Members noted that the Executive Leadership Team recently reviewed capital project priorities for the 10 year Capital Plan. It was noted that concerns have been raised with DoH around Command & Control and Red Fleet, which have been raised as an additional need within the 10 year Capital Plan.

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

Officers provided further explanations/answered Members' questions relating to the information presented, and in particular, On-Call underspend.

With respect to On-Call recruitment, Members stated they would welcome a review of the process to attract more candidates.

### **Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP)**

Members noted the NIFRS Community Risk Management Plan 2023-2028.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer gave the background to the history around the development of the Community Risk Management Plan (CRMP). He explained that the CRMP presented to Members today is a Publisher version which has been reviewed and approved by the CRMP Project Board.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer outlined the next steps, subject to final feedback and comments, and the CRMP would be presented to DoH for approval and to seek clarification around public consultation. He stated that he would like the CRMP to go out to consultation in December 2023/January 2024.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer paid tribute to Ms Reynolds and her team who are driving CRMP forward.

Mrs Singleton outlined that Emergency Response Standards (ERS) will be a challenge and noted that reliance will be on credible risk based data and methodologies validated by the Strategic Investment Board (SIB). She highlighted that full engagement had taken place at the previous CRMP Project Board meeting around CRMP and ERS, and referred Members to Page 59 of the report around Health & Safety. Mrs Singleton stated that she would fully commend approval of the CRMP to the Board.

Members commended the CRMP and noted it was good to have a document that sets out the framework and depicts the way forward. They paid tribute to all those involved in moving CRMP forward.

The Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer acknowledged Members' comments and noted that CRMP provides a cornerstone in going forward. He also paid tribute to all those involved with developing the CRMP.

**The Board unanimously approved NIFRS Community Risk Management Plan 2023-2028 for onward transmission to DoH for approval.**

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At this point, Mr Enright left the Meeting (3.20 pm)

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### *Emergency Response Standards (ERS)*

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer provided an update on progress around the Emergency Response Standards (ERS). He stated that the team had been tasked with looking at the 2006 ERS to see if they remain valid and it was noted that these are no longer fit for purpose based on the operational risk profile.

Members noted that new standards are being developed with the Strategic Investment Board providing independent validation support to the process.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer provided an overview of the breakdown of the emergency response standard and how it would be made up of 3 specific and measurable times. He noted that all 3 times have been assessed and are currently being independently validated.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer outlined the next steps and noted engagement would take place with internal/external stakeholders including the Board, Representative Bodies and DoH. He noted there may be a challenge with respect to concisely but comprehensively setting out any changes via community communication, but the team are working hard to draft this work. Discussion would also take place with DoH around approvals and public consultation around ERS.

Members noted that a Board Workshop on ERS has been scheduled for 23 January 2024.

The Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer answered Members' queries with respect to ERS.

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At this point, Mr Craig left the Meeting (3.40 pm)

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### **Item 5: Chairperson's Business**

The Chairperson formally announced Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings' appointment as NIFRS Chief Fire & Rescue Officer.

The Chairperson referred to the Special Board Meeting scheduled for 11 January 2024 at LDC Cookstown and gave an overview of the timetable for the day. He noted that good progress is being made on site and that LDC Cookstown is on target for opening in May/June 2024.

The Chairperson acknowledged the charity fundraising events undertaken by NIFRS Firefighters.

The Chairperson referred to the Health & Safety Workshop held earlier in the day and noted that Health & Safety should be a standing item on the Agenda. Members concurred.

It was noted that consideration would also be given to nominating a Board Health & Safety Champion.

**Actions: Health & Safety to be added as a standing item on the Board Agenda; and consideration to be given to nominating a Board Health & Safety Champion.**

The Chairperson referred to the Board Task & Finish Group and noted a meeting has been scheduled for 4 December 2023. He extended an invitation to DoH for representation on the Board Task & Finish Group.

The Chairperson provided an update with respect to Maggie's Call and noted a positive meeting had been held with Maggie Black's mother on 27 November 2023.

The Chairperson outlined that he was an observer at the previous People & Culture and Service Delivery Committee meetings. He noted he would arrange to attend the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee as an observer.

The Chairperson suggested for members of Operational and Support employees to be invited to Board/Committee Meetings to enable 2-way communication and to encourage inclusivity. Mr O'Hanlon agreed with the suggestion and noted that he has seen this in practice.

**Action: Consideration to be given to members of Operational and Support employees to be invited to Board/Committee Meetings to enable 2-way communication and to encourage inclusivity.**

The Chairperson acknowledged and thanked the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer for his work during the period of his tenure, and on behalf of NIFRS Board, extended best wishes to the Interim Chief Fire & Rescue Officer for the future.

#### **Item 7: Relevant Correspondence**

Members noted Dear Accounting Officer Letter - DAO (DoF) 04/23 – Managing Public Money Northern Ireland (MPMNI) – 2023 Update.

#### **Item 8: Documents for Sealing**

Members noted the following document for sealing:

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Bavan Contracts - Refurbishment of Donaghadee Fire Station.

#### **Item 9: January/February 2024 Key Dates**

A provisional schedule of key dates for January/February 2024 was noted.

**Item 10: Any Other Business**

Ms Anley acknowledged the work of NIFRS and the management of the recent flooding incidents in Newry and Downpatrick.

Mr Kennedy also referred to the recent multi-agency animal rescue in Lough Erne.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Jennings informed Members of 2 nominations for the Emergency Fire & Excellence Awards – Watch Commander Clive Hamilton (RCC/Fire Cadets/British Red Cross Fire & Emergency Support Services) and Mrs Hamilton (Fire Cadets/British Red Cross Fire & Emergency Support Services). The Board extended their best wishes to Watch Commander and Mrs Clive Hamilton on their nominations.

The Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and wished everyone a Merry Christmas.

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THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS  
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED  
AT 1558 HOURS

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