

NORTHERN IRELAND FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE BOARD

MINUTES OF A MEETING

1 OCTOBER 2024

1.40 PM

PRESENT: Mr J Colville, Chairperson
Mr A Jennings, Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Ms B Anley
Mr J Craig
Mrs L Devlin
Mr P Kennedy
Mr J Lennon
Mr T O'Hanlon
Mrs H Singleton
Ms L Smith

APOLOGIES: Mr J Quinn

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr M Deeney, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mr B Stanfield, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer
Mrs T Ramsay, Director of People & Culture
Mrs P White, Director of Finance & Support Services
Miss D Reynolds, Head of Planning, Performance & Governance
Mrs C Shields, Assistant Director of Finance
Ms I Hill, Governance & Business Support Services Advisor

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 O'Hanlon declared a potential conflict of interest with respect to Item 4 – Standalone Strategic Items – Total Finance System and stated that he would leave the Meeting for this Item of Business.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer informed the Meeting of his recent appointment as a Trustee to the Board of the National Fire Chiefs' Council. Mrs Devlin and Ms Anley both informed the Meeting of recent appointments to the Harbour Commissioner and the Department of Justice respectively.

Item 3: Minutes of Board Meeting – 25 June 2024

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 June 2024, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and agreed as an accurate record on the motion of Mr Lennon, seconded by Ms Smith.

Historical Board Minutes

The following Minutes, of Closed Sessions of the Board, having been previously circulated, were taken as read and unanimously agreed as accurate records.

- 22 February 2022;
- 28 March 2022;
- 26 April 2022;
- 3 May 2022(1);
- 3 May 2022(2);
- 5 July 2022;
- 21 September 2022;
- 25 November 2022;
- 12 January 2023(1);
- 12 January 2023(2);
- 27 January 2023;
- 13 February 2023;
- 29 August 2023.

Item 4: Standalone Strategic Items

2023/24 Board Governance Self-Assessment

The 2023/24 Board Governance Self-Assessment document, generated in tandem with the Chairperson and Members of the Board Effectiveness Working Group was noted.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance outlined the background to the development and noted that the Self-Assessment document had been presented to the Board Effectiveness Working Group. She further noted that number of recommendations have rolled over and are reflective of the work being progressed through the Working Group.

The Chairperson referred to the level of the information circulated to Members and in particular the volume of workload for the Service Delivery Committee and explained that it is hoped to streamline and reduce the level of information presented. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members on the work to date with regard to the information flows across the various meeting forums. He added that the outworkings of this will be presented to the Board Effectiveness Working Group.

The Chairperson noted the 7 actions emanating from the Self-Assessment document. Noting the current position with respect to Committee membership, the Chairperson commented that the Board was awaiting a further appointment and that he may revisit this once the Member has been appointed.

At this point,
Mr Craig joined the Meeting

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance updated the Meeting on the current position in respect of the other recommendations emanating from the document.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Lennon, seconded by Ms Anley, unanimously approved the 2023/24 Board Governance Self-Assessment.

NIFRS ProCAD Support and Maintenance 2025

Members noted the Business Case, and associated Executive Summary, for NIFRS ProCAD Support and Maintenance for the period 1 January 2025 to 31 December 2025.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney explained the need for NIFRS to provide continued support for the current Command & Control (ProCAD) system from 1 January 2025 until 31 December 2025 while a replacement system project is delivered to replace the legacy system, noting it will provide the essential support and maintenance for the existing system until a new C&C system has been implemented.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney explained why the support is for one year only and that further support and maintenance will be required after 2025 until the C&C project is initiated. It was noted the contract provider is a sole supplier and that to not proceed creates a significant risk to NIFRS.

Mr Lennon noted the position that the contract provider is a sole supplier and, given previous issues with the C&C project, asked if there was any risk that the company may withdraw from providing support and maintenance for the current system.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney highlighted that the company has a well established working relationship with NIFRS and have assured NIFRS that they will support the system.

In response to questions from Members regarding timeframes, Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Deeney explained that the ProCAD Support and Maintenance could only be procured in 12 month blocks. He further explained that it is hoped to bring forward the C&C Business Case in November.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members on discussions regarding the timeframes and other constraints including licences and also updated Members on the progress with respect to drafting the Business Case for the replacement system.

Ms Smith asked if the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer had any concerns with the proposal. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer explained that the proposed approach addresses some of the concerns stressing the need to move forward as support and maintenance is essential to the C&C system and service delivery.

During discussion, Members concurred that C&C system is fundamental to service delivery but expressed concern that contract could be exited before the replacement system is in place. Members expressed their preference for a longer term support and maintenance contract and pressed the organisation to try and look at this again.

Members acknowledged the issue is the lift of an outdated hardware/software of the existing system and sought assurance that a BCP is in place and has been tested. Members also stressed the need to closely monitor the procurement and progress of the contract and suggested that it may need to be included on the Board Agenda going forward. Mrs Singleton noted the cost for the support and maintenance contract and questioned the affordability of same.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer concurred with the preference for a 2-year contract but explained that it was simply not an option. He also explained that he did not have huge concerns regarding ProCAD as he is more concerned with respect to the second piece of the replacement system which manages the communications integration. He assured Members that a BCP is in place and is regularly tested.

The Director of Finance & Support Services referred to the affordability aspect of the contract and explained the position with regard to both capital and revenue funding.

The Board, on the motion of Ms Smith, seconded by Ms Anley, unanimously approved the Business Case for NIFRS ProCAD Support and Maintenance 2025.

Finance Report

Members noted the Finance Report updating Members on the financial position as at 31 August 2024.

The Director of Finance & Support Services provided an overview of the key information presented with regard to the revenue budget noting NIFRS opening allocation of £101.5m. She explained that confirmation is awaited with respect to the additional recurrent allocation.

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services drew attention to the areas of overspend referring in particular to Support Staff pay. She explained that the overspend is driven by the high number of staff vacancies and sick absence which is being covered by Agency staff. She noted that the headcount is slightly over establishment explaining that there are critical roles being supported that are supernumerary to the establishment, eg, Vehicle Technicians. She explained that these are primarily managed by vacancies in the system.

The Director of Finance & Corporate Services noted the position with respect to the Operating Expenditure overspend and the underspend on Premises. She explained that the underspend is mainly due to Estates Maintenance but that restrictions in this area will be relaxed as we move through the year and have better indications of the corporate position.

Referring to the Capital Budget, the Director Finance & Support Services noted the current position. She advised Members of a potential pressure of £4m in the Red Fleet project which is currently at the tender stage and expenditure is envisaged to be incurred in the last quarters. She added that this has been brought to the attention of DoH and is currently being kept under review.

With respect to LDC Cookstown, the Director of Finance & Corporate Services commented that it is expected that the allocation for the year will be fully utilised by the year end as it is anticipated that there will be a final close out (excluding retentions which are 12 months) by November 2024.

Members noted the update on Prompt Payment Performance and Business Case approvals.

Mr Kennedy commented that it was encouraging that NIFRS is looking at a balanced outcome but expressed concern with regard to the impact of the £208k underspend on Premises. He also enquired when the revenue costs of LDC Cookstown will start to impact and also the Boucher element. Ms Anley also expressed concern with regard to this given NIFRS' aging estate. She suggested the need to consider this strategically and the impact of lack of strategic spend. Mr O'Hanlon enquired if the pause in Estates Maintenance will have any impact on progressing welfare facilities.

The Director of Finance & Support Services explained that the impact of an underspend in Estates Maintenance had been acknowledged from the outset as backlog maintenance increases. She stated that some measures are being relaxed to try to mitigate any further impact. She stressed that any slippage in the budget will provide an opportunity to address maintenance. With respect to the welfare facilities, she explained that this work is funded through the Capital budget. She noted the current position with regard to the backlog maintenance which continues to increase and outlined work to capitalise the backlog list. She highlighted that a lot is being achieved with a small team and a limited capital budget.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted that a twice-yearly holistic assessment of Stations is conducted which includes Health & Safety. He explained that any issues identified are escalated to Facilities & Assets. He further noted that this had been discussed in detail at the Service Delivery Committee ~~with~~ at which 2 documents relating to Estates had been presented. One related to Estates Procurement Performance which had highlighted that NIFRS had achieved a 'green' rating with respect to same. He added that 69% of NIFRS premises are in good condition with 21% needing some element of input. He stressed that Facilities & Assets prioritise the backlog. He also noted that based on the CRMP are looking at District Offices, etc, and that an agile working environment is also being progressed. He reiterated that these 2 papers set out everything relating to NIFRS estate.

Ms Anley expressed concern that there may be a gap emerging in our current governance with respect to Health & Safety as accountability was at risk of being devolved to Committee level.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Stanfield gave assurance in his role that the Health & Safety Forum provides a channel to escalate any risks and explained that any significant risk to the organisation would be escalated.

The Chairperson explained that the critical Strategic Performance Indicators (SPIs) will be coming to the Board at the upcoming Risk Management Workshop and pointed out the need for the Board to identify the 5 most critical and working together with the Executive Leadership Team also identify the key metrics.

Ms Anley stated that she had no doubt that Health & Safety within the organisation is managed robustly but noted her difficulty with the pathways and assurances. She stressed the need to address same soon.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance updated Members on work to date with respect to the SPIs and explained that work is ongoing to identify a suitable person to assist with Business Planning.

In response to Mr Kennedy's query relating to revenue costs associated with LDC Coosktown, the Director of Finance & Support Services outlined the current position explaining that it will take 12-24 months of utilisation of the College to properly understand the costs. She also updated Members on the current position with regard to the divestment of Boucher which would be at least 18 months.

Total Finance System

At this point,
Mr O'Hanlon declared an interest and left the Meeting

A briefing paper was noted updating Members with regard to the Total Finance System contract expiration notice and mitigation of impact.

The Director of Finance & Support Services noted that this issue had been escalated to the Board following verbal updates at the Service Delivery and Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Meetings. She explained that the paper presented was to make the Board aware of the emergent position with regard to the Total Finance system and mitigations being taken forward.

The Director of Finance & Support Services updated Members on the current position explaining the NIFRS currently has a contract for support and maintenance for the Finance system through to March 2026. However, Total Finance has written in August to advise NIFRS that they will be withdrawing support from 1 June 2026 following Microsoft's withdrawal of support for the platform on which the application is built.

The Director of Finance & Support Services also updated Members on discussions to date and noted the position with respect to the licence for the system and any risks if there are issues with the system. She pointed out that system will continue to function past 1 June but this will be a risk. The Director of Finance & Support Services outlined the work which has commenced to scope a new system requirements against a standard set of requirements and also options available through established frameworks.

The Director of Finance & Support Services reiterated that NIFRS is now in a critical risk position with regard to the finance and payroll systems currently in use and while work had been progressing on a new solution (shared system), the time available means that we need to find a solution as a matter of urgency. She noted that the Risk Register will be updated to reflect this emergent critical risk.

The Director of Finance & Support Services explained that the systems can work independently and added that the systems being demo'd are currently utilised in other Fire & Rescue Authorities and are available through the G-Cloud framework for a contracting period of 5 years. This would allow NIFRS to implement a new system and then review the position at an appropriate stage to consider migration into the wider Shared Services. She noted the position with regard to the development of separate business cases and NIFRS' delegated limit for IT projects of £1.5m.

Members noted that a business case is being prepared by NIFRS SIB Digitisation specialist and it is the aim to bring this to the November Board Meeting. She explained that the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and herself will be engaging with the Department in advance of the October Ground Clearing meeting to discuss and agree a direction of travel. She added that should the business cases exceed delegated limits, NIFRS will need support with regard to expediting approvals of the same.

The Director of Finance & Support Services acknowledged the resourcing challenges for the organisation as it requires to resource and manage 3 major systems changes

Discussion took place with regard to Shared Services and Members noted that this is a must consider option but acknowledged that this is not always the best option. In response to a question from Mr Kennedy, the Director of Finance & Support Services stated that confirmation had been received from BSO that a shared service is not deliverable in the required timescale. She explained that the proposed approach of a 5 year contracting period (3+1+1) provided the opportunity to consider a move into shared services when the new system is in place.

Members expressed concern in relation to the potential difficulty of securing Departmental approval for these business cases given the move away from shared services. The Director of Finance & Support Services explained that she had raised the concern as she believed both business cases will be within delegated limits and how this will be perceived by the Department. She explained that they will be advising that NIFRS will not be going into shared services now and this would be a compromise position.

Mr Craig stressed the importance of receiving formal support from DoH to proceed under NIFRS delegated authority.

Ms Smith noted discussions at the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee regarding this issue noting that NIFRS has considered BSO shared service and how this would look. She pointed the importance of openness and transparency with the Board and DoH around the risks/issues with the finance system and the proposed approach. She stressed the need to ensure the Board is content with approach and to consult with DoH. She indicated her support for the separate systems approach.

The Director of Finance & Support Services noted the current position with the business cases but assured Members that she and the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer will be engaging with DoH regarding the matter to ensure openness and transparency.

Mrs Singleton noted that the matter had also been discussed at the Service Delivery Committee and suggested the need for parallel running of the systems prior to June 2026.

With respect to the suggestion of parallel running, the Director of Finance & Support Services stated that NIFRS will take advice from the provider but this would be factored into normal practice. She stated that the project is doable with the support of DoH.

At this point,
Mr O'Hanlon rejoined the Meeting

The Meeting adjourned at 3.15 pm for a short break

The Meeting reconved at 3.25 pm

CRMP Update

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance updated Members on 4 of the 5 workstreams noting that Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Stanfield would be updating on Area Council Alignment later in the Meeting. With respect to the CRMP consultation process it was highlighted that approval from Sponsor Branch had been received on 25 September to proceed with Public Consultation.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that the public consultation will 'go live' on 3 October with Board Members receiving prior notification correspondence on 2 October. She highlighted that an internal and external Communications Plan has been drafted and provided a brief overview of the plan. She noted that the Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer will be the spokesperson for the Service.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance advised Members that Public Consultation pages have been developed and tested within the website and that consultation will run for 14 weeks as the consultation runs over the Christmas period and will close on 9 January 2025. She noted that the first external stakeholder engagement with local Councils will take place at a NILGA facilitated meeting on 11 October.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance also explained that following completion of consultation NIFRS will consider all responses and make any necessary amendments to the CRMP, compile a consultation report and respond to those consultees who have requested a response. The final CRMP will then be presented to the Board in February for final approval.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance drew attention to the date for the CRMP and highlighted that it has now been changed to 2025-2030. She explained that this is a public/community facing document and normal practice is that calendar years are used and added that for accountability purposes, the CRMP will be from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2030. She added that the CRMP was a 'live' document while consultation is ongoing.

Members extended their appreciation to the Team for all their work.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance then updated Members with regard to the Emergency Response Standards (ERS); Economic & Social Value (ESV) and the Strategic Assessment of Risk (SAR)

Referring to ERS, the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance informed Members that DoH briefings have been scheduled to start in the first week in November. She outlined the work currently underway noting that NIFRS will review all ERS narrative to ensure it is as concise and accurate for consultation purposes. She also outlined the timeline for public consultation which at best is now quarter 4, however, this will be dependent of DoH approval timelines and may move into the next financial year.

With respect to the Economic & Social Value (ESV), the Head of Planning, Performance & Governance highlighted that Phase 1 is nearing completion. She stated that this is a significant project for the CRMP Project Board. It will serve as NIFRS' first initiative (based on UKFRS sponsored academic methodologies) to calculate the baseline ESV of our Service (rather than focusing solely on cost). She provided a brief synopsis of the work undertaken to date. She noted that an initial overview of this data and findings was presented to the CRMP Project Board the previous week. She further noted that a presentation on the ESV Project will be presented to Board at its November Meeting.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance informed Members that version 3 of the Strategic Assessment of Risk (SAR) is in final draft and noted that an overview of the new version was also presented to the CRMP Project Board the previous week. She explained that SAR continues to evolve and develop with version 3 now integrating National Risk Register Hazards and Threats to further support our community risk assessment. She noted that it is hoped that this version will progress through to approval by end of quarter 3.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer noted that all these projects take us to the outworkings of the HMI Report and that Members will be receiving an update on same in a few weeks. He commended the Deputy Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and his Team for all their work.

Mr Lennon acknowledged that NIFRS has moved to a much more project based working and suggested the need for the Board and the Executive Leadership Team to look at this longer-term and how the resources/skillsets may look.

The Chairperson referred to the Board Away Day on 10 October and stated that this will be an opportunity to discuss further.

Ms Anley commended the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and the Executive Leadership Team and also Mrs Singleton for all their work.

Mrs Singleton commented that the work being undertaken by NIFRS has been sector leading, no other FRS is pursuing CRMP, ERS and ESV together. She reported positively on the ESV debate at the Project Board but noted the need to proceed with caution.

Area Council Alignment (ACA) Update

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Stanfield noted the current position with respect to the Area Council Alignment (ACA) and in particular updated Members with respect to the negotiations with the Representative Body.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Stanfield outlined the timeline for the ACA with the Implementation Plan commencing on 13 October, with the structures being put in place November-January.

Ms Smith commented positively on the progress attained with this direction of travel which will be beneficial and cost-effective.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Stanfield concurred that ACA is cost neutral and highlighted that it is about Safer Together and partnership working and will bring enhanced governance for the organisation.

The Chairperson noted that 6 January will bring a stable layer of supervision to the organisation and remove levels of temporary positions. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer commented that ACA was the right thing to do.

Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Stanfield informed Members that this is Fire Safety Week and that it had been jointly launched on Monday. He highlighted that a new online portal for Home Fire Safety Checks had also been launched.

LDC Cookstown Third Party Use

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer informed Members that there is significant interest in the use of the LDC Cookstown site and noted the level of enquiries to date. He acknowledged the need however to ensure that NIFRS' needs are met first. He explained that key is the cost recovery model with the caveat that NIFRS is in year 1 of using the site.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer updated Members on discussions with NIAS to use the site and noted that NIAS had formally written to him regarding their proposal. He stated that this was a welcome step forward but noted the need for conversations with DoH with respect to finalising the catering requirement for the College which is a significant challenge. He explained that NIFRS is currently considering a direct award contract for catering in the meantime and noted that a business case is currently being drafted.

The Director of Finance & Support Services provided an update on the current position with regard to catering and the proposed direct award contract. She explained the need to provide catering at the facility and noted that the interim position only provides meals for trainees. She provided an overview of the options being considered within the catering contract.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer stated that he wished to be open and transparent with respect to the catering issue as without catering 3rd party use cannot be offered. He also expressed his concerns with regard to the interim catering solution for trainees. He reiterated that 3rd party options will become available in the future, noting again that an agreement with NIAS is imminent. He also noted the interest from RNLi in the Flood Water Rescue facility as well as interest expressed by the National Fire Directorate.

2023/24 AR&GC Self-Assessment

Members noted the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Self-Assessment which had been generated in tandem with the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Members.

Mr Kennedy, Chairperson of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, noted that the compliance was satisfactory and, whilst accepting there were a few areas which could improve, reported positively on the outcome of the assessment.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance commented that the template used for the Self-Assessment was the National Audit Office template and outlined how the Assessment was compiled. She drew attention to the recommendations emanating from the report noting that there was one new recommendation and a couple of carry forwards. She gave a brief overview of the recommendations and updated Members on the current position.

2023/24 Interim AR&GC Annual Report to the Board

The 2023/24 Interim Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Annual Report was noted.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance explained that the Committee was cognisant that it had not advised the Board of the Internal Audit position hence the issue of an interim Report. She commented that the Report to the Board covers, in the main, activity within the 2023-24 financial year with the exception of external audit outcomes which remain outstanding. She advised Members that, based on the work undertaken by Internal Audit in 2023-24, management had been provided with unsatisfactory assurance. She highlighted that a final Annual Report will be presented once the external audit process concludes.

The Director of Finance & Support Services referred to the statutory requirement to lay the Accounts in November however stated that she was unsure if this applied to NIFRS. She advised Members that the audit had commenced but could potentially be delayed due to the focus on Totalview.

Mr Kennedy stated that the Committee had decided to present an interim Report to ensure compliance noting that the delay in external audit is outwith NIFRS.

Performance Management

Members noted the Quarter 1 Annual Business Plan Progress and Performance Management Updates.

The Head of Planning, Performance & Governance provided a detailed overview of the information presented which reflects progress as at 30 June 2024. She drew attention to the SPIs and in particular slippage in 5 areas. She provided an explanation of the statistics relating to sickness absence and the work being undertaken to address same.

The Director of People & Culture provided a further explanation with respect to the sickness statistics, how they are being captured and monitored. She noted that a report will be presented to the People & Culture Committee in November. The Officers answered Members' questions relating to aspects of the information presented.

Change in the Order of Business

It was agreed to take the next Item of Business - Boucher Crescent Meanwhile Use later in the Meeting.

NIFRS Pension Board – Annual Report

The NIFRS Pension Board Annual Report for the year ended 31 March 2024 was noted.

The Director of Finance & Support Services highlighted that this was the first year of a fully functioning Pension Board. She outlined the background to the development of the Report which complies with the Pension Board's Terms of Reference. She explained that the aim of the Report is to provide assurance to the Scheme Manager regarding the Pension Board's role in overseeing the effective administration of the Scheme.

The Director of Finance & Support Services gave an overview of the salient points within the Report.

Change in the Order of Business

It was agreed to take Item 6 – Reports from Board Committees, Noting of Committee Minutes and Adoption of Committee Recommendations – as the next Item of Business.

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

People & Culture Committee - Minutes – 22 May 2024

The Minutes of the People & Culture Committee Meeting held on 22 May 2024 were noted. Members further noted that the recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 25 June 2024.

People & Culture Committee – Meeting – 18 September 2024

Members noted that a Meeting of the People & Culture Committee Meeting had been held on 18 September 2024 and that the Minutes will be presented to a future Board Meeting.

Ms Smith, Chairperson of the People & Culture Committee, gave an overview of the business discussed which included discussion around the draft NOG Alignment Plan, progress against the Recruitment Plan and arrangements for the management of temporary vacancies for Principal Officers. She also reported positively on a presentation which the Committee had received relating to the Professional Competence Framework. She referred to discussion with respect to the draft NOG Alignment Plan noting that further work is required on the draft.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer provided an update on the draft NOG Alignment Plan and explained that the Plan will be brought back to the Committees in November.

Ms Smith noted there was one recommendation emanating from the Committee Meeting.

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

People & Culture Recommendation

- ***To approve the arrangements for the Management of Temporary Vacancies for Principal Officers – subject to confirmation that S75 screening was undertaken and if consultation took place with the Representative Body.***

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee - Minutes – 23 May 2024

The Minutes of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Meeting held on 23 May 2024 were noted. It was further noted that the recommendations contained therein were adopted by the Board at its Meeting on 25 June 2024.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Meeting – 19 September 2024

Members noted that a Meeting of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Meeting had been held on 19 September 2024 and that the Minutes will be presented to a future Board Meeting.

Mr Kennedy, Chairperson of the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, noted the business discussed and provided an overview of same and the recommendations emanating from the Meeting. With respect to the Internal Audit Reports, he noted that both Audits had received satisfactory assurance.

Mr Kennedy referred to the Governance Document Review Project and noted that due to pressures of work there had been slippage in the project. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer commented on the current position and the lack of resources. He noted that some of the documents feed into the Operational Guidance and assured Members that ELT will continue to report into the Committees.

The Board, on the motion of Mr Lennon, seconded by Ms Anley, unanimously agreed to adopted the undernoted recommendations emanating from the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee Meeting.

Audit, Risk & Governance Committee – Recommendations

- **Approval of the Business Continuity Management Policy;**
- **Approval of the NIAO Audit Committee Self-Assessment 2023-24;**
- **Acceptance of the Audits of Accident Investigations Processes; and Operational Performance & Assurance Processes**

Service Delivery Committee - Minutes – 29 May 2024

The Minutes of the Service Delivery Committee Meeting held on 29 May 2024 were noted.

At this point,
Mr O’Hanlon left the Meeting (4.42 pm)

Service Delivery Committee - Meeting – 18 September 2024

Members noted that a Meeting of the Service Delivery Committee Meeting had been held on 18 September 2024 and that the Minutes will be presented to a future Board Meeting.

Mrs Singleton, Chairperson of the Service Delivery Committee, provided a synopsis of the key business discussed at the Meeting. She referred to the Programme Management of Estates Projects and commended the Head of Facilities & Assets and her Team for their work. She noted that the current position with respect to NIFRS leases and also the Agile Working Policy.

With respect to Health & Safety, Mrs Singleton highlighted that this is a Standing Item on the Agenda of the Service Delivery Committee. She informed Members of one issue relating to the launch of 9m ladders onto appliances and updated the Meeting on the current position and action taken to mitigate. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer provided a further explanation with regard to this issue.

Mrs Singleton noted discussion also with respect to Grenfell Phase 2, the Digital Radio Project, Risk Critical Information and the NOG project.

Members noted that there were no recommendations emanating from the Meeting.

Remuneration Committee – Meeting – 30 September 2024

Members noted that a Meeting of the Remuneration Committee Meeting had been held on 30 September 2024 and that the Minutes will be presented to a future Board Meeting.

The Chairperson noted the key business discussed at the Meeting which included Job Evaluation outcomes and an honorarium which recognised the work and commitment of a Finance Team noting the Committee is recommending approval of same for submission to the Department.

The Board, on the motion of Mrs Devlin, seconded by Mr Lennon, unanimously agreed to adopt the following 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, noting that those posts under appeal do not need to be brought back;**
- **Approval of job evaluation outcomes of new posts to support progression of recruitment;**
- **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; and**
- **Approval of the Honorarium payment for Payroll staff.**

Item 5: Chairperson's Business

Grenfell Fire Inquiry Report

The Chairperson noted his discussion with Chief Fire & Rescue Officer following the publication of the final report following the public inquiry.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer stated that the matter is covered significantly within the business of the Service Delivery Committee and outlined how phase 2 will be progressed by Area Commander Rooney.

Fire Safety Week

The Chairperson noted that Fire Safety Week launched yesterday and is running until 6 October 2024.

Road Safety Week

The Chairperson advised Members that he is attending at an event in Stormont on 11 October to promote Road Safety.

National Joint Council

The Chairperson noted that he will be attending the NJC AGM and the 200th anniversary of the founding of the Edinburgh Fire Engine Establishment celebrations on 22-23 October 2024.

Area Commander Inspections

The Chairperson reported positively on his attendance at recent Area Commander Inspections.

Board Away Day

The Chairperson gave Members a brief synopsis fo the intinerary for the Board Away Day being at LDC Cookstown on 10 October 2024.

Item 4: Standalone Strategic Items Boucher Crescent Meanwhile Use

Members noted an Options Paper relating to 67 Boucher Crescent Meanwhile Use.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer outlined the background to the Paper explaining that as NIFRS training is now centralised in LDC Cookstown, the Boucher Crescent training site is surplus to requirements and the organisation has been working towards divestment. He noted that disposal of the site is a referenced key deliverable for the affordability of the new Cookstown site.

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer advised that the Paper explores options for a way forward and highlighted that an offer has been received by a Television Production Company to lease the premises while the full divestment of the property is progressed by the Divestment Working Group. He noted that Board approval is required to progress this option.

The Director of Finance & Support Services updated Members on discussions with DoH regarding the proposal. She provided an overview of the objectives within the Paper and outlined the options for consideration which includes a current request for use as well as an alternative option that would potentially provide a solution until divestment can be finalised.

At this point,
Mr Craig left the Meeting (5.10 pm)

The Chairman enquired if NIFRS could run the D1 process and options 2 and 3 in parallel. The Director of Finance & Support Services explained why this would not be viable.

Mrs Singleton raised a question regarding whether the premises can be used for commercial business and if NIFRS is content this will meet the tenancy piece with BCC. The Director of Finance & Support Services noted the legal advice received with regard to the options being considered.

With respect to the options, the Director of Finance & Support Services outlined the potential impacts on the budget of the options being considered. She noted that discussions had not been held with DoH with respect to any income generated. She updated Members on feedback received from LPS regarding the rates for the site if NIFRS vacate the site.

The Director of Finance & Support Services drew Members' attention to the options appraisal summary and affordability tables contained within the Paper.

Members noted that Option 1 requires NIFRS to allocate budget from the site as a 'mothball' site while taking forward the D1 process. Looking at the 'Do Something' Options, all deliver a net benefit across the period November 2024 to December 2026.

The Director of Finance & Support Services referred to the D1 process and noted the need to run the process as due diligence is key piece with regard to governance.

The Chairperson sought Members' views with respect to the options provided.

During a full and frank discussion with regard to the options presented, the Officers answered Members' questions relating to aspects of the information presented particularly in relation to leases and existing contracts if this is needed. Members agreed with the need for due diligence and to progress the D1 process. They also acknowledged the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer's concerns in relation to the perception of not proceeding with the meanwhile use proposal even though the benefits are notional.

The Director of Finance & Support Services suggested that Option 4 be progressed noting that this could be phased as there are a number of stages. She explained that the D1 process could be launched in parallel to discussions with BCC. She further explained that once the process has been launched NIFRS should be able to seek information regarding the commercial aspects for the site. Subsequently a paper could be brought back to the Board setting out the outcomes and options for the way forward. She pointed out the need for BCC to agree with how NIFRS wishes to proceed.

Following further discussion, the Members unanimously agreed that NIFRS proceed with Option 4 taking a phased approach.

Item 7: Relevant Correspondence

There was no relevant correspondence.

Item 8: Documents for Sealing

The following documents were noted for sealing.

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service with –

Newry, Mourne & Downpatrick District Council – Lease Extension – Office Accommodation (Downpatrick District), Ground Floor, Downshire Civic Centre, Downshire Estate, Ardglass Road, Downpatrick, BT30 6GQ;

Canavan Construction Limited – Maghera Fire Station Refurbishment Works;

Mullinasallagh Limited T/A OB Construction – Newtownards Fire Station Refurbishment & Demolition of Single Storey Building;

NI Policing Board – Lease – Communications Mast at Comber Fire Station.

Item 9: September 2024 Key Dates

A provisional schedule of key dates for October/November 2024 was noted.

Any Other Business

The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer informed Members that Assistant Chief Fire & Rescue Officer Stanfield would be reverting back to his substantive role as Area Commander. He paid tribute to his work and thanked him for his support and assistance.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS
AND THE MEETING TERMINATED
AT 6.13 PM
