

HIGHLAND AND ISLANDS FIRE BOARD
NO. 2 2006/2007

Minutes of Meeting of the Highland and Islands Fire Board held in the Council Chamber,
Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Friday, 25 August 2006 at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Representing the Highland Council

Mr A R McFarlane Slack
Mr D C M Flear
Mr W A Mowat
Mr A Mackay
Mrs R Finlayson
Mrs M E Paterson
Mr J Laing

Mr R A C Balfour
Mr A Milne
Mrs H Carmichael
Mr R Lyon (Substitute)
Mrs L MacDonald
Mr N M Clark

Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Mr D MacLean
Mr M MacLeod

Mr R Morrison
Mr N M MacLeod

Representing Orkney Islands Council

Mr R C Sclater

Mr A Drever

Representing Shetland Islands Council

Mr W Tait

Mr J P Nicolson

Officials in attendance:

Mr B Murray, Chief Fire Officer
Mr T Wood, Deputy Chief Fire Officer
Mr H Henny, Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Mr U MacLennan, Area Manager, Training and Development
Mr D Gill, Area Manager, South Command
Mr A MacAllister, Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service (HIFRS) Head of Corporate Services
Ms L Govan, HIFRS Human Resources Manager
Mrs M Grigor, Treasurer's Office
Mrs S Barrie, Principal Project Manager, Property & Architectural Services, Highland Council
Mr J Kelman, Project Manager, Property & Architectural Services, Highland Council
Ms R Pieroni, Clerk
Mrs R Moir, Assistant Clerk
Ms L Lee, Clerk's Office

Also in attendance:

Mrs S Pollock, Audit Scotland
Mrs R Seidel, Audit Scotland

Mr A R MacFarlane Slack in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr R W Durham, Dr D Alston, Mr J Ford and Mr A Gordon.

2. Obituary – Mrs Margaret MacLennan

The Convener paid tribute to the late Mrs Margaret MacLennan, who had been a Substantive Member of the Board since 1995. Members recalled the contribution Mrs MacLennan had made, not only to the work of the Board, but also in promoting the cohesion of its Members through her sense of fun. She was sadly missed. The Board extended condolences to her family and friends.

3. Appointments to the Board

The Board **NOTED** that the Highland Council had appointed (i) Mrs Helen Carmichael, previously a Substitute Member of the Board, as a Substantive Member, to fill the vacancy created by the death of Mrs MacLennan, and (ii) Mr Ron Lyon, to fill the Substitute Member position previously held by Mrs Carmichael.

The Convener welcomed Mrs Carmichael and Mr Lyon to their first meeting of the Board; similarly, he welcomed Mr T Wood, Deputy Chief Fire Officer, and Mr Jason Kelman, Project Manager, Property & Architectural Services, the Highland Council, to their first meeting.

4. Appointments to Working Groups and Sub-Committees Etc.

a) Audit Working Group

Following the death of Mrs MacLennan, the Board **AGREED** to appoint Mrs H Carmichael to the Audit Working Group.

b) Grievance Appeals Sub-Committee

Following the death of Mrs MacLennan, and with a view to increasing its membership to six to make it easier to achieve a quorum for any given meeting, the Board **AGREED** to appoint Mr A MacKay and Mr N M Clark to the Grievance Appeals Sub-Committee.

In this context, Members also **NOTED** (i) that the enactment of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 had resulted in the introduction of a number of changes in relation to Discipline and Grievance procedures which impacted on the role of the Board and (ii) that a briefing/training session would be provided in due course to all Board Members in relation to these changes, particularly with a view to assisting the understanding of Members appointed to the Board following the May 2007 local government elections.

5. HM The Queen's Birthday Honours

Members were advised that the following Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service (HIFRS) staff had been recognised in HM the Queen's Birthday Honours list announced on 17 June 2006:

- i.** Mr Hugh Henny, Assistant Chief Fire Officer, had been awarded the Queen's Fire Service Medal; and

- ii. Mrs Alice Arthur, Sub Officer, Retained Fire Unit , Out Skerries, Shetland, had been awarded an MBE for services to the community.

The Convener outlined the respective employment history and current activities of both members of staff, which extended beyond the duties required by their employment, and commented on their outstanding achievements, which were worthy of recognition. The awards reflected well on the Board and were also a matter of pride to the officers themselves and to the wider community.

The Board concurred with the Convener's comments and **NOTED** the awards.

6. Minutes of Meeting held on 25 April 2006

There had been circulated and were **AGREED** Minutes of Meeting of 25 April 2006.

The Chief Fire Officer updated the Board on developments on progress with a number of issues since the last meeting, including:

- i. (Item 5) Capital Expenditure 2005/06 – Monitoring Statement: Discussions had now been held with the Scottish Executive regarding the projected underspend of £257,000 and the Board had received agreement that this amount be carried forward; this was reflected in the current year's accounts.
- ii. (Item 11) Consultation on Leadership and Development in the Fire and Rescue Service: following receipt of the HIFRS response to this consultation, representatives from the Scottish Executive would be visiting the Service to meet with HIFRS officers to discuss further the issues raised in the consultation response.
- iii. (Item 13) Capital Programme Monitoring Report: the meeting with Scottish Water, to discuss issues including the water supply to the retained fire station at Dunvegan, was now scheduled to take place on 18 September 2006.

The Board **NOTED** the information given.

7. Audit Working Group - Minutes

There had been circulated and **APPROVED** Minutes of Meeting of the Audit Working Group held on 11 August 2006. With reference to Item 9 of the Minutes, the Board accordingly **AGREED** that the remit of the Audit Working Group be extended to include early scrutiny of the Chief Fire Officer's Public Performance Report and Service Plan.

With regard to the ongoing Audit Scotland Performance Audit being carried out across all Fire and Rescue Services in Scotland, the Vice-Convener advised that the Local and National Performance Audit reports were expected to be available by the end of 2006 and by January 2007 respectively and that both reports would be considered by the Audit Working Group and the Board.

The Chief Fire Officer reported that the Service had been subjected to a high level of scrutiny, the Performance Audit process having been detailed and resource-intensive. The Service welcomed this and had responded in an open and transparent manner. The Auditors would be returning in September 2006 to assess progress made on issues which the Service had identified and was in the process of addressing. The final phases of the Performance Audit, involving scrutiny of documentation, had yet to be completed, but feedback to date had been positive, with the Service's submission (copies of which were available at the meeting) receiving particular praise.

Those Members who had been interviewed in course of the Performance Audit reported on their experiences, stating that the process had been interesting and enjoyable. The Chief Fire Officer undertook to make copies of the self-assessment form available to all Members for information.

The Board **AGREED** that Mrs S Pollock, Audit Scotland, be invited to present the outcome of the Performance Audit to the Board in due course. Mrs Pollock intimated informally that she would be happy to do this.

8. Chief Fire Officer's Public Performance Report 2005/06

There had been circulated Report No. FIRE27/06 dated 10 August 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer, together with his Public Performance Report for 2005/06. The Executive Summary of the Report was tabled.

The Board was reminded that the Chief Fire Officer's Public Performance Report (PPR) was published annually and was the mechanism by which performance was reported for the previous financial year. It also provided stakeholders with an understanding and insight into the vital work of the Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service. The Chief Fire Officer drew attention to the Service's Strategic aims and the links between these and the Service Plan's objectives. With reference to the Performance Figures contained in the Report, 92 out of 98 Service Plan targets had been met. Achievements included:

- 3,000 home fire safety visits had been carried out, with over 1,500 fire safety alarms fitted
- partnership working had been strengthened, allowing the Service to target vulnerable groups
- the engineering section had delivered 14 fire appliances
- 6 new station builds had been completed.

The Report showed that the Service was making good progress but would continue to set challenging targets to ensure high standards continued.

In response to questions raised regarding action which could be taken to reduce late night alcohol-related fires, the Area Manager, Community Risk Management, reported that proactive steps were being taken, with a Memorandum of Understanding having been drafted supporting granting late licences to food units. This would be submitted to the Safety Partnership Meeting and, whilst it was accepted that the Police would not want crowds to gather in areas where there was a high risk of public order offences, the Memorandum would propose that each application for late night catering be assessed on its own merits, in order that some late night catering could be provided. A report would be submitted to the Board on progress in this regard in due course.

In response to questions raised regarding support to other Fire and Rescue Services in the event of a terror attack or major incident, the Chief Fire Officer stated that HIFRS was part of the strategic Highlands and Islands Co-ordination Group, which also included the Police, the Local Authorities and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency. Officers also worked with other Fire and Rescue Services in the course of their Gold Command training. Exercises were held and the Service was as prepared as possible for major events.

A further development in improving the level of service to the public was the "First Responders" scheme, which had been developed through partnership working with the Scottish Ambulance Service and involved Fire Service staff responding to medical emergencies and using equipment such as defibrillators. The scheme had been successfully piloted at Helmsdale

and was now to be rolled out to other areas. The local Member was thanked for her input and assistance in resolving initial difficulties.

After discussion, the Board **APPROVED** the Chief Fire Officer's Public Performance Report for publication.

9. Statement of Unaudited Accounts 2005/06

There had been circulated Report No. FIRE28/06 comprising the Statement of Unaudited Accounts for 2005/06. The Treasurer drew attention to the main financial outcomes of 2005/06, including that the £113,000 year-end surplus had been transferred to reserves and that £257,000 had been returned to the Constituent Authorities. The Vice-Convenor having drawn attention to the two areas the Report identified as requiring attention, the Board **NOTED** the information given.

10. Revenue Expenditure 2006/07 – Monitoring Statement

There had been circulated Report No. FIRE29/06 dated 31 July 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer on Revenue Expenditure for the period to 30 June 2006, together with statement by the Treasurer.

Actual gross revenue expenditure to 30 June 2006 (excluding capital charges) amounted to £4,367,000, compared with £4,560,000 as estimated in the period budget to date. The year-end projection as per the statement showed total estimated expenditure of £22,255,000, compared with the approved budget of £22,597,000. The Chief Fire Officer drew attention to this estimated year-end underspend of £342,000, but pointed out that the budget included £571,000 funded from revenue reserves and efficiency savings.

The Chief Fire Officer reported the achievement of a number of efficiency savings arising from prudent management and other savings including the introduction of rural rates relief claims, interest on revenue balances and relatively low activity levels. It was believed that the lower activity levels reflected the impact of performance management measures, such as the call reduction strategy. Members were reminded, however, that, in an emergency service, activity levels could fluctuate.

In light of the current financial uncertainty caused by the Government's Spending Review, Firelink and Transitional Funding, the Service would continue to seek efficiency savings to ensure that reserves were replenished. However, the need to replenish reserves had to be balanced against the considerable capital challenges faced by the Service and, if the opportunity arose to progress capital projects, this would be taken.

The Board **NOTED** the terms of the report and **AGREED** that the Chief Fire Officer continue to monitor the position and to use any surplus revenue to (i) replenish reserves and (ii) take forward capital projects where possible.

11. Capital Expenditure

a) Out-turn 2005/06

There had been circulated Report No. FIRE30/06 dated 7 August 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer on the financial out-turn for 2005/06, showing projected underspend of £0.340m against the capital plan. The priority list of capital expenditure on stations, as previously circulated to the Budget Working Group on 11 August 2006, was tabled for information.

The Board **NOTED** the information given.

b) Monitoring Statement 2006/07

There had been circulated Report No. FIRE31/06 dated 31 July 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer on Capital Expenditure for the period to 30 June 2006, together with statement by the Treasurer.

The Chief Fire Officer advised that, although current expenditure levels were low, these were expected to increase throughout the year as projects were taken forward. Based on assurances he had received from Property & Architectural Services, the Highland Council, it was anticipated that the budget would come in on target, including the spend profile for the new Fire Stations at Beauly and Fort William. However, these and other projects would be monitored, as experience had demonstrated the difficulty in predicting the outcome of a construction programme, which could fluctuate.

In response to questions raised regarding the Fort William project, in particular concerns as to the likely outcome of the contaminated land survey and any additional costs potentially arising, the Project Manager, Property & Architectural Services, the Highland Council, indicated that these issues were near resolution: negotiations with the relevant local authority officers had been completed to their apparent satisfaction.

The Board **NOTED** the information given.

12. Capital Plan Developments – Budget Working Group - Minutes

There had been circulated Minutes of Meeting of the Budget Working Group held on 11 August 2006.

The Convener drew particular attention to the prioritised list of stations requiring development under reference at item 6 of the Minutes and emphasised that this list, while serving as an information backdrop to the implementation of the capital programme, did not necessarily represent the actual order in which works would or could be done. All legal, practical and economic factors had to be weighed in each case and the list would be open to constant revision.

There was some discussion as to whether the Board had as yet received sufficient information in relation to the final plans and costings for the development with the Uig Hall Committee of the proposed joint project at Uig, previously approved in principle by the Board at its meeting on 24 November 2005, to permit formal commitment to participation to be made, whilst protecting the Board's needs and interests. Western Isles Members reported their understanding that final plans and costings had been made available; however, these had not as yet been seen by the Board's officers. The matter would be clarified as a matter of urgency.

In response to questions, Principal Project Manager, Property & Architectural Services, the Highland Council, advised Members that an energy option appraisal would be carried out in relation to every station project. Clarification was given on the status of a number of site acquisitions and Members were reminded of the constraints facing the Board in expediting upgrades as quickly as might be wanted or as stations would merit.

After discussion, the Board **APPROVED** the Minutes of Meeting of the Budget Working Group held on 11 August 2006 and accordingly **AGREED** that:

- i. the Board's revenue projections be further explored at the Working Group;
- ii. revenue and capital monitoring statements be standing agenda items for future meetings of the Working Group;
- iii. future capital plans be submitted to the Board for consideration and debate with a priority list taking account of the Board's Capital Strategy, the IRMP, activity levels, site availability and existing facilities; and
- iv. the priority list appended to the report circulated to the Working Group (item 6 of those Minutes refers) be used as the basis for any necessary contingency measures arising in the current year.

13. IT Partnership Progress Report

There had been circulated Report No. FIRE32/06 dated 23 July 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer providing an update on progress with the IT Partnership with Fujitsu and detailing the project plan. Fujitsu would provide an IT network for the Service's 95 Retained stations, providing improved communications with Service managers as well as enhanced access to learning and development material. As part of the project, development of a new Corporate Intranet was also being undertaken.

The Board **NOTED** the information given.

14. Increase in Special Charges

There had been circulated Report No. FIRE33/06 dated 10 August 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer recommending a revised table of charges for Special Service Charges.

The Board **APPROVED** the changes to Special Service Charges and **AGREED** that future similar reports also detail the previous charges levied, to make clear the level of increase being introduced.

15. Community Fire Risk Reduction Analysis Project

There had been circulated Report No. FIRE34/06 dated 11 August 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer on the Community Fire Safety (CFS) Risk Reduction Analysis project. The project would involve the Service embarking on a ground-breaking approach to develop a method to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of CFS initiatives. The project was the first of its kind in the UK and would inform the Integrated Risk Management Planning (IRMP) Process and strategic planning in making communities safer. It would also enable the development of a more targeted and effective use of the Service's resources.

The Board **NOTED** the progress of this initiative and that further reports would be submitted to the IRMP Working Group as the project developed.

16. Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service (HIFRS) and Community Engagement

There had been circulated Report No. FIRE35/06 dated 10 August 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer advising that, although the Service had done much in recent times to engage the community in its decisions, and was committed to people having a greater say in how local services were planned and delivered, a recent Audit Scotland report had found that, in Scotland, "community engagement is progressing but it needs to be more sustained and systematic".

There had also been circulated separately an HIFRS document entitled "The National Standards for Community Engagement – A Review", presenting the outcome of a review of the

Service's community engagement efforts against the National Standards for Community Engagement and setting out a draft Statement of Intent.

During discussion, emphasis was placed on the importance attached by the Service and the Board to partnership working with communities, particularly in the context of Integrated Risk Management. Attention was also drawn to the need to keep matters under review and to identify appropriate engagement mechanisms in the context of the new political structures to be put in place following the Local Government elections in May 2007.

After discussion, the Board **AGREED** to:

- i.** develop, publish and circulate a Statement of Intent;
- ii.** place responsibilities for managing Community Engagement within a specific function;
- iii.** produce a Community Engagement Strategy and Policy; and
- iv.** appoint the Convener as Community Engagement Champion for the Board.

17. Board Members – Support and Development

Following the circulation of a learning needs questionnaire at the Fire Board meeting on 27 April 2006, there had been circulated Report No. FIRE36/06 dated 11 August 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer providing an overview of the 17 responses received and recommending that development opportunities be planned for current and future Fire Board Members. The report also outlined the role of Champions and recommended that plans be made to initiate a strategy to fully meet the training and development needs of Members.

Having heard the Deputy Chief Fire Officer comment that enquiries were being made into the possibility of introducing a Quality Assured Members' development charter, the Board **AGREED** that:

- i.** a seminar be arranged for Members in November 2006;
- ii.** a two day induction programme be organised and held within the first six months of the new Fire Board being formed;
- iii.** ongoing refresher training be planned throughout the life of the next Board; and
- iv.** development plans be agreed for Champions, with ongoing support, training and development provided by the Service.

18. Rank to Role

There had been circulated and was **NOTED** Report No. FIRE37/06 dated 2 August 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer:

- i.** advising that, in line with the modernisation agenda and following National Guidance, the HIFRS had undertaken the process of the move from Rank to Role;
- ii.** setting out the processes involved in this transition and the outcomes; and
- iii.** drawing attention to the possibility that a number of appeals might arise following the changes.

19. Capital Programme Monitoring Report

There had been circulated for noting Report No. FIRE38/06 dated 27 July 2006 by the Director of Property and Architectural Services of the Highland Council on progress with projects carried out by the Board.

The Board **NOTED** the information given and in particular that:

- i. investigations were ongoing into the causes of flooding problems in the vicinity of Stornoway Fire Station; and
- ii. a meeting would be held with Scottish Water on 18 September 2006 to seek to resolve the outstanding issues surrounding the water supply to the almost completed new Fire Station at Dunvegan.

20. Site Acquisitions Progress Report

There had been circulated and was **NOTED** Report No. FIRE39/06 dated 27 July 2006 by the Director of Property and Architectural Services of the Highland Council summarising the current status of acquisitions for the Highland and Islands Fire Board projects and contracts as at that date.

21. Planned and Capitalised Maintenance Report – Monitoring

There had been circulated and was **NOTED** Report No. FIRE40/06 dated 20 July 2006 by the Director of Property and Architectural Services of the Highland Council on Planned Maintenance Programmes and progress being made.

22. Chief Fire Officer’s Activity/Progress Report – July 2006

There had been circulated and was **NOTED** Report No. FIRE41/06 dated 11 August 2006 by the Chief Fire Officer providing an overview of the Service’s activity for April, May and June 2006 and covering the following areas:

- i. Community Risk Management
- ii. Performance Management
- iii. Intervention
- iv. Letters of Appreciation and Complaint

The Board **AGREED** that individual letters of appreciation and complaint, which had been available for inspection by Members prior to the meeting, be declared exempt information by virtue of Paragraph 1 of Part I of Schedule 7A of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

23. Execution of Deeds

a) Recently Executed Deeds

The Board **NOTED** the deed recently executed on behalf of the Board, as set out in the Agenda for the meeting.

b) Authorised Signatories

Members were reminded that, currently, the Clerk and the Head of Legal Services, the Highland Council, were authorised to sign deeds on behalf of the Board.

The Board **AGREED**:

- i. that the Assistant Clerk and the Highland Council’s two Legal Managers (Conveyancing and Commercial) also be authorised to sign deeds in the absence of both the current authorised signatories; and
- ii. to homologate the signing by the Assistant Clerk in such circumstances of a number of deeds since the last Board meeting.

24. Schedule of Meetings

The Board **AGREED** that the first scheduled meeting of the Board in 2007 be held on Friday, 19 January 2007.

25. Exclusion of the Public

The Board **RESOLVED** that, under Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, the public be excluded from the meeting during discussion of the following items on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act, the relevant paragraphs being shown below.

26. Fort William Fire Station – Acceptance of Tender – Homologation

Paragraphs 8 and 9

There had been circulated to Members only Report No. FIRE42/06 dated 31 May 2006 by the Director of Property and Architectural Services of the Highland Council on the award of contract for Fort William Fire Station in favour of the most economically advantageous tender received. As the contract sum had, however, exceeded the budget allocation for this project, the Board **AGREED** to homologate the action of the Clerk in awarding this contract following consultation with the Convener.

27. Staffing Issues

Paragraph 11

There had been circulated to Members only and **APPROVED** Report No. FIRE43/06 dated 21 August 2006 by the Clerk concerning the terms of a draft legal agreement and financial settlement in respect of eight fire-fighters at Stornoway Fire Station.

The meeting ended at 4.15 p.m.