



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte  
Máinnystrie O Poustie



**Northern Ireland  
Fire & Rescue Service**

# PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

**Department of Health and Northern Ireland  
Fire & Rescue Service**

January 2024

*Safer  
Together*

## Version Control

Version	Board Approval	DoH Approval	Date of Review
2			

---

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
1    The Partnership Agreement	5
<b>NIFRS Establishment &amp; Purpose</b>	<b>8</b>
2    Statutory Purpose and Strategic Objectives	8
<b>Governance Arrangements</b>	<b>10</b>
3    Organisational Status	10
4    Governance Framework	10
5    NIFRS Board	11
6    Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	12
7    NIFRS Chair	13
8    Chief Fire & Rescue Officer	14
<b>Role of the Department of Health (DoH)</b>	<b>16</b>
9    Partnership Working with NIFRS	16
10   Lead Official	17
11   Annual Engagement Plan	18
12   Departmental Accounting Officer	19
13   Attendance at Public Accounts Committee	20
<b>Assurance Framework</b>	<b>22</b>
14   Autonomy and Proportionality	22
15   Board Effectiveness	23
16   Board Appraisals	24
17   Internal Audit Assurance	24
18   Externally Audited Annual Report and Accounts	25
<b>Annex 1 – Key Legislation &amp; Powers</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Annex 2 – Engagement Plan</b>	<b>33</b>

---

<b>Annex 3 – Delegated Authority</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Annex 4 – Assurance Framework</b>	<b>423</b>
<b>Annex 5 – Concerns/Complaints in respect of Board Members</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Annex 6 – Applicable Guidance</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Annex 7 – Role of the Minister</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Annex 8 – Role of HM Fire Service Inspectorate, Scotland</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Annex 9 - Code of Best Practice</b>	<b>50</b>

# Introduction

---

## 1 The Partnership Agreement

- 1.1 This document sets out the partnership arrangements between the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) Board and the Department for Health (DoH). It explains the overall governance framework within which the NIFRS operates, including the framework through which the necessary assurances are provided to stakeholders. Roles/responsibilities of partners within the overall governance framework are also outlined.
- 1.2 The partnership is based on a mutual understanding of strategic aims and outcomes; clear accountability; and a recognition of the distinct roles each party contributes. Underpinning the arrangements are the principles set out in the NI Code of Good Practice **‘Partnerships between Departments and Arm’s-Length Bodies’** which should be read in conjunction with this document. The principles which are laid out in the Code are:

LEADERSHIP
<i>Partnerships work well when Departments and Arm’s Length Bodies demonstrate good leadership to achieve a shared vision and effective delivery of public services. Strong leadership will provide inspiration, instil confidence and trust and empower their respective teams to deliver good outcomes for citizens.</i>
PURPOSE
<i>Partnerships work well when the purpose, objectives and roles of Arm’s Length Bodies and the sponsor department are clear, mutually understood and reviewed on a regular basis. There needs to be absolute clarity about lines of accountability and responsibility between departments and Arm’s Length Bodies. In exercising statutory functions Arm’s Length Bodies need to have clarity about how their purpose and objectives align with those of departments.</i>

## **ASSURANCE**

*Partnerships work well when departments adopt a proportionate approach to assurance, based on Arm's Length Bodies' purpose and a mutual understanding of risk. Arm's Length Bodies should have robust governance arrangements in place and in turn departments should give Arm's Length Bodies the autonomy to deliver effectively. Management information should be what is needed to enable departments and Arm's Length Bodies to provide assurance and assess performance.*

## **VALUE**

*Partnerships work well when departments and Arm's Length Bodies share knowledge, skills and experience in order to enhance their impact and delivery. Arm's Length Bodies are able to contribute to policy making and departmental priorities. There is a focus on innovation, and on how departments and Arm's Length Bodies work together to deliver the most effective policies and services for its customers.*

## **ENGAGEMENT**

*Partnerships work well when relationships between departments and Arm's Length Bodies are open, honest, constructive and based on trust. There is mutual understanding about each other's objectives and clear expectations about the terms of engagement.*

A full copy of the NI Code of Good Practice 'Partnerships between Departments and Arm's-Length Bodies' can be found at Annex 8.

1.3 This document should also be read in conjunction with guidance on proportionate autonomy which provides an outline of the principles and characteristics for applying a proportionate autonomy approach. Guidance on proportionate autonomy has been considered in determining the extent of engagement and assurance to be established between the NIFRS and the Department and this is reflected in this agreement.

1.4 DoH and the NIFRS are committed to:

- Working in partnership within distinct roles and responsibilities;
- Maintaining focus on successful delivery of Programme for Government (PfG) outcomes and Ministerial priorities;

- Maintaining open and honest communication and dialogue;
- Keeping each other informed of any issues and concerns, and of emerging areas of risk;
- Supporting and challenging each other on policy development and delivery (when developing policy this may cut across more than one department);
- Seeking to resolve issues quickly and constructively with the intention to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy; and
- Acting at all times in the public interest and in line with the values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

1.5 The effectiveness of the partnership and the associated Engagement Plan will be reviewed each year by DoH and NIFRS to assess whether the partnership is operating as intended and to identify any emerging issues or opportunities for enhancement. This can be carried out as part of existing governance arrangements.

1.6 The Partnership Agreement document itself will be reviewed formally at least once every three years to ensure it remains fit for purpose and up-to-date in terms of current governance frameworks. The formal review will be proportionate to the NIFRS' size and overall responsibilities and will be published on DoH and NIFRS websites as soon as practicable following completion.

1.7 A copy of this agreement has been placed in the Assembly Library and is available on the DoH and NIFRS websites.

# NIFRS Establishment & Purpose

---

## 2 Statutory Purpose and Strategic Objectives

- 2.1 Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) established on 1 July 2006 by The Fire and Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006. This Order established the body corporate known as the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service Board (in this Order referred to as “the Board”), and the Board shall be the fire and rescue authority for Northern Ireland.
- 2.2 NIFRS through its Board and Officers, is responsible for ensuring that its functions are conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. NIFRS’ statutory functions, duties and powers are outlined in three primary pieces of legislation (See Annex 1) and are summarised as follows –

### Statutory Function

Provision of a fire and rescue authority for Northern Ireland

### Duties

Training and equipping staff to fight fire; to respond to road traffic collisions; to respond to other emergencies; to focus on fire safety, prevention, and education; and to discharge statutory responsibilities for Chemical, Biological, Radiation and Nuclear (CBRN); Search and Rescue (SAR); serious flooding; and serious transport incidents.

### Powers

Articles 18 – 21 of the Fire & Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 give specific powers to NIFRS and their Officers (See Annex 1)



- 2.3 NIFRS, as a Non-Departmental Public Body, is accountable to the Department of Health (DoH) for all its actions and specifically the roles and responsibilities laid out in this Partnership Agreement.
- 2.4 The Minister for Health is answerable to the Assembly for the overall performance and delivery of both DoH and NIFRS.
- 2.5 The Northern Ireland Executive’s outcome-based approach to delivery recognises the importance of arm’s length bodies and departments working collaboratively and together in a joined-up approach to improve overall outcomes and results.
- 2.6 To that end there is strategic alignment between the aims, objectives and expected outcomes and results of the NIFRS and DoH.
- 2.7 The strategic aims of the NIFRS are influenced and shaped by several factors including the Draft Programme for Government (PFG), Departmental health and fire priorities as shown below -



# Governance Arrangements

---

## 3 Organisational Status

- 3.1 Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) is a legal entity, employing its own staff and operating at arm's-length from the Department. As a legal entity it must comply with all associated legislation including legislation relating to its employer status.

## 4 Governance Framework

- 4.1 NIFRS has an established Corporate Governance Framework which reflects all relevant good practice guidance. The framework is underpinned by the governance structures established within NIFRS and the internal control and risk management arrangements in place. This includes its Board and Committee Structure.
- 4.2 An account of this is included in NIFRS' annual Governance Statement together with the NIFRS Board's assessment of its compliance with the extant Corporate Governance Code of Good Practice (NI). Any divergence from the Corporate Governance Code must be explained in the Governance Statement. The extant Corporate Governance Code of Good Practice (NI) is available on the DoF website.
- 4.3 NIFRS is required to follow the principles, rules, guidance and advice in *Managing Public Money Northern Ireland*. A list of other applicable guidance and instructions which NIFRS is required to follow is set out in Annex 6. Good governance should also include positive stakeholder engagement, the building of positive relationships and a listening and learning culture.

## 5 NIFRS Board

- 5.1 NIFRS is managed by a Non-Executive Board, members of which are appointed by the Minister for Health. The NIFRS Board comprises a non-executive Chairperson and 10 non-executive Members, 4 of whom are District Councillors and the remainder are Lay Members. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer is also a member of the NIFRS Board. The appointment process for non-executive Board members complies with the Code of Practice on Public Appointments for Northern Ireland.
- 5.2 As Public Appointees, Board members are office holders rather than employees and as such they are not subject to employee terms and conditions. Board appraisal arrangements are set out in paragraph 16 of this Agreement and arrangements for dealing with concerns/complaints in respect of Board members are provided in Annex 5.
- 5.3 The Board's Standing Orders, Scheme of Delegation, Standing Financial Instructions and Board/Committee Terms of Reference provides further detail on roles and responsibilities and should align closely with this Partnership Agreement.
- 5.4 The purpose of the NIFRS Board is to provide effective leadership and strategic direction to the organisation and to ensure that the policies and priorities set by the Minister for Health are implemented effectively. It is responsible for ensuring that the organisation has effective and proportionate governance arrangements in place and an internal control framework which allow risks to be effectively identified and managed. The Board will set the culture and values of the organization and set the tone for the organisation's engagement with stakeholders and customers.
- 5.5 The Board is responsible for holding the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer (and senior staff) to account for the management and leadership of the organisation and the delivery of agreed plans and outcomes. The Board should also support the CFRO as appropriate in the exercise of their duties.

- 5.6 Board members act solely in the interests of the Board and must not use the Board as a platform to champion their own interests or pursue personal agendas. They occupy a position of trust and influence and their standards of practice and behaviour must be exemplary and in line with the seven principles of public life (Nolan principles). NIFRS has a Board Code of Conduct and there are mechanisms in place to deal with any Board disputes/conflicts to ensure they do not become wider issues that impact on the effectiveness of the Board. A Board Register of Interests is maintained, kept up to date and is publically available to help promote public confidence in NIFRS.
- 5.7 Board communication and engagement is underpinned by a spirit of trust and professional respect. The Board recognises that using consensus to avoid conflict or encouraging members to consistently express similar views or consider only a few alternative views does not encourage constructive debate and does not give rise to an effective Board dynamic.
- 5.8 It is for the Board to decide what information/data it needs to inform its meetings/its effective operation. If the Board is not confident that it is being fully informed/appraised regarding the functioning of the organisation, the Chair of the Board will work to ensure sufficient knowledge and information is collated and shared to allow effective stewardship and governance.
- 5.9 To fulfil their duties, Board Members must undertake initial training, and regular ongoing training and development. Review of Board skills and development will be a key part of the annual review of Board effectiveness.

## **6 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

- 6.1 A further important aspect of NIFRS governance framework is its Audit, Risk & Governance Committee, established in line with the extant Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI).
- 6.2 The Audit, Risk & Governance Committee's purpose/role is to advise the Board on governance issues. In line with the handbook the Audit, Risk & Governance Committees focuses on:

- Assurance arrangements over governance; financial reporting; annual reports and accounts, including the Governance Statement; and
- Ensuring there is an adequate and effective risk management and assurance framework in place.

6.3 NIFRS and DoH have agreed the following arrangements which may include the need for:

- Attendance by departmental representatives at NIFRS' Audit, Risk & Governance Committee meetings;
- Access required to the Audit, Risk & Governance Committee papers and minutes;
- Any input required from NIFRS' Audit, Risk & Governance Committee to DoH's own Audit and Risk Assurance Committee etc.

6.4 Full compliance with the handbook is an essential requirement. In the unlikely event of significant non-compliance with the handbook's five good practice principles (or other non-compliance) discussion will be required with the Department and full explanation provided in the annual Governance Statement.

6.5 The extant Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI) is available on the DoF website.

## **7 NIFRS Chair**

7.1 The Chair of NIFRS is responsible for setting the agenda and managing the Board to enable collaborative and robust scrutiny, stewardship, and governance of issues. The Chair's role is to build competence and effectiveness of the Board and ensure effective and supportive relationships are fostered in order that the Board can work collaboratively to reach a consensus on decisions. To achieve this they should ensure:

- The Board has an appropriate balance of skills appropriate to its business;
- Board members are fully briefed on terms of appointment, duties, rights and responsibilities;
- Board members receive and maintain appropriate training;

- The Minister is advised of NIFRS's requirements when Board vacancies arise;
- There are Standing Orders (SOs) and Standing Financial Instructions (SFIs) in place setting out the roles and responsibilities of the Board in line with relevant guidance; (see para 5.6 above).

7.2 The role also requires the establishment of an effective working relationship with the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer that is simultaneously collaborative, supportive and challenging. It is important that the Chair and Chief Fire & Rescue Officer act in accordance with their distinct roles and responsibilities as laid out in Managing Public Money and their appointment letters.

7.3 The Chair has a presence in the organisation and cultivates external relationships which provide helpful collaborative links for the Service while being mindful of not overstepping role boundaries or becoming too involved in day-to-day operations.

## **8 NIFRS Chief Fire & Rescue Officer**

8.1 The role of the NIFRS Chief Fire & Rescue Officer is to run NIFRS' functions. The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer is responsible for all executive management matters affecting the organisation and for leadership of the executive management team.

8.2 The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer is designated as NIFRS Accounting Officer by the departmental Accounting Officer (see section 12). As Accounting Officer they are responsible for safeguarding and stewardship of public funds in their charge and ensuring they are applied only to the purposes for which they were voted and more generally for efficient and economical administration.

8.3 The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer is accountable to the Board for NIFRS' performance and delivery of outcomes and targets and is responsible for implementing the decisions of the Board and its Committees. They maintain a dialogue with the Chair on the important strategic issues facing the organisation

and ensure, through the Chair, that board agendas address these. They must ensure that there is effective communication with stakeholders and communication on this to the Board. They must also ensure that the Chair is alerted to forthcoming complex, contentious or sensitive issues affecting the organisation.

- 8.4 The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer acts as a role model to other executives by exhibiting open support for the Chair and Board members and the contribution they make. The Chair and Chief Fire & Rescue Officer have agreed how they will work together in practice, understanding and respecting each other's role, including the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer's responsibility as an Accounting Officer, and the interfaces with the Department.
- 8.5 The Chief Fire & Rescue Officer is the Principal Officer for handling cases involving the NI Public Sector Ombudsman. They shall advise the departmental Accounting Officer of any complaints about NIFRS accepted by the Ombudsman for investigation, and about the proposed response to any subsequent recommendation from the Ombudsman.
- 8.6 Further detail on the role and responsibilities of the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer are as laid out in Managing Public Money NI and their Accounting Officer appointment letter.

# Role of the Department of Health (DoH)

---

## 9 Partnership Working with NIFRS

- 9.1 The Department of Health (DoH) and Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) are part of a total delivery system, within the same Ministerial portfolio. The partnership between DoH and NIFRS is open, honest, constructive and based on trust. There is mutual understanding of each other's objectives and clear expectations on the terms of engagement.
- 9.2 In exercising its functions NIFRS has absolute clarity on how its purpose and objectives align with those of DoH. There is also a shared understanding of the risks that may impact on each other and these are reflected in respective Risk Registers.
- 9.3 There is a regular exchange of skills and experience between DoH and NIFRS and where possible joint programme/project delivery boards / arrangements. NIFRS may also be involved as a partner in policy/strategy development and provides advice on policy implementation and/or the impact of policies in practice.
- 9.4 The Department of Finance (DoF) has established, on behalf of the Assembly, a delegated authority framework which sets out the circumstances where prior DoF approval is required before expenditure can be incurred or commitments entered into. The Accounting Officer of the Department of Health has established an internal framework of delegated authority for the Department and its ALBs which apply to NIFRS.

HSC(F) 33-2023 - Revised HSC & NIFRS Delegated Limits and requirements for Departmental / DoF approval

Other specific approval requirements established in respect of NIFRS are set out at Annex 3.



9.5 Once the NIFRS budget has been approved by the Department of Health and subject to any restrictions imposed by statute/ the Minister / this Partnership Agreement or any other circulars, directives, and best practice guidance that may issue from, or by way of, the Department, NIFRS shall have authority to incur expenditure. This does not however remove the need to seek formal departmental approval where any proposed expenditure is outside the delegated limits or is for new schemes not previously agreed. Specific delegated limits for NIFRS are set out in Annex 3. Nor does it negate the need to follow due processes laid out in guidance contained in Managing Public Money NI and Better Business Cases NI.

## **10 Lead Official**

10.1 DoH has appointed a lead senior official to manage the relationship with NIFRS and ensure effective partnership working. Engagement between the Department and NIFRS will be co-ordinated, collaborative and consistent with the spirit of partnership working. A clear sense of collaboration and partnership working will be demonstrated and role-modelled to staff in both the Department and NIFRS.

10.2 The lead senior official is the Deputy Secretary of Resource and Corporate Management Group who has a clear understanding of NIFRS' responsibilities for policy implementation/operational delivery and the relevant audiences/stakeholders involved. The lead senior official will be supported by the Director of Public Inquiries and Public Safety (PIPS) and the Head of Sponsorship of Public Safety and Inquiries Branch (SPSI). If an event arises and the lead senior official is not contactable the enquiry can be raised with the next appropriate senior official.

10.3 The lead senior official will ensure that where there are departmental staff changes, time is taken to ensure a full understanding of NIFRS business and objectives.

## 11 Annual Engagement Plan

- 11.1 The Department and NIFRS will agree an engagement plan before the start of each business year. The Annual Engagement Plan (Annex 2) will set out the timing and nature of engagement between NIFRS and the Department. The engagement plan will be specific to NIFRS and should not stray into operational oversight.
- 11.2 Engagement between the Department's lead official/their teams and NIFRS will be centred on partnership working, shared understanding of risks and supportive working and scrutiny on business developments that align with policy objectives.
- 11.3 In line with relevant guidance, NIFRS will work in collaboration and partnership with the Department to prepare its corporate and business plans. There should be good high level strategic alignment between departmental and NIFRS plans. Once approved it will be the Board of NIFRS that holds the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer to account for delivery and performance. The Department will engage with NIFRS on areas of strategic interest, linking departmental policy and NIFRS delivery of policy intent.
- 11.4 The Annual Engagement Plan will also reference the management and financial information to be shared over the course of a year, agreed between the Department and NIFRS. The aim will be to ensure clear understanding of why information is necessary and how it will be used. Where the same, or similar information is required for both internal governance and reporting to the department, as far as possible information requirements will be aligned so that a single report can be used for both purposes. In addition, the engagement plan should consider opportunities for learning and development, growth and actions which could achieve better outcomes.

## 12 Departmental Accounting Officer

- 12.1 The departmental Accounting Officer is accountable to the NI Assembly for the issue of grant in aid to NIFRS. They have designated the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer of NIFRS as NIFRS Accounting Officer and respective responsibilities of the departmental Accounting Officer and the NIFRS Accounting Officer are set out in Chapter 3 of Managing Public Money Northern Ireland. The departmental Accounting Officer may withdraw the NIFRS Accounting Officer designation if they conclude that the NIFRS Accounting Officer is no longer a fit person to carry out the responsibilities of an Accounting Officer or that it is otherwise in the public interest that the designation be withdrawn. In such circumstances the NIFRS Board will be given a full account of the reasons for withdrawal and an opportunity to make representations. Withdrawal of NIFRS Accounting Officer status would bring into question employment as Chief Fire & Rescue Officer and the Chair should engage with the Department should such circumstances arise.
- 12.2 As outlined in section 8, the NIFRS Chief Fire & Rescue Officer is accountable to the NIFRS Board for their stewardship of NIFRS. This includes advising the Board on matters of financial propriety, regularity, prudent and economical administration, efficiency and effectiveness.
- 12.3 Each organisation must have an Accounting Officer available for advice or decision as necessary at short notice. When the Accounting Officer is absent and cannot readily be contacted, another senior official should deputise. If a significant absence of more than 4 weeks is planned, the Accounting Officer, should invite DoF (or the sponsor department, as the case may be) to appoint a temporary acting Accounting Officer.
- 12.4 The departmental Accounting Officer must be informed if the judgement of the NIFRS Accounting Officer (on matters for which they are responsible) is over-ridden by the NIFRS Board. The NIFRS Accounting Officer must also act if the NIFRS Board is contemplating a course that would infringe the requirement for financial propriety, regularity, prudent and economical administration, efficiency

or effectiveness. In all other regards, the departmental Accounting Officer has no day-to-day involvement with NIFRS or its' Chief Fire & Rescue Officer.

12.5 In line with DoF requirements, the NIFRS Accounting Officer will provide a periodic declaration of fitness to act as Accounting Officer to the departmental Accounting Officer.

### **13 Attendance at Public Accounts Committee**

13.1 The NIFRS Chief Fire & Rescue Officer/Accounting Officer may be summoned to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to give evidence on the discharge of their responsibilities as Accounting Officer (as laid out in their Accounting Officer appointment letter) on issues arising from the C&AG's studies or reports following the annual audit of accounts.

13.2 The Chair may also, on occasion, be called to give evidence to the Public Accounts Committee on such relevant issues arising within the C&AG's studies or reports, in relation to the role and actions taken by the Board, where appropriate.

13.3 In addition, the DoH Accounting Officer may be summoned to appear before the Public Accounts Committee to give evidence on the discharge of their responsibilities as departmental Accounting Officer with overarching responsibility for NIFRS. In such circumstances, the departmental Accounting Officer may therefore expect to be questioned on their responsibilities to ensure that:

- there is a clear strategic control framework for NIFRS;
- sufficient and appropriate management and financial controls are in place to safeguard public funds;
- the nominated NIFRS Accounting Officer is fit to discharge his or her responsibilities;
- there are suitable internal audit arrangements;
- accounts are prepared in accordance with the relevant legislation and any accounting direction; and

- intervention is made, where necessary, in situations where the NIFRS Accounting Officer's advice on transactions in relation to regularity, propriety or value for money is overruled by the body's Board or its Chair.

# Assurance Framework

---

## 14 Autonomy and Proportionality

14.1 The Department of Health (DoH) will ensure that Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) has the autonomy to deliver effectively, recognising its status as a separate legal entity which has its own Board and governance arrangements. Guidance on proportionate autonomy has been considered in determining the extent of engagement and assurance established between NIFRS and DoH and is reflected in this agreement.

14.2 A proportionate approach to assurance will be taken based on NIFRS' overall purpose, functions and budget and a mutual understanding of risk. The approach will include an agreed process through which the NIFRS Accounting Officer provides written assurance to the Department that the public funds and organisational assets for which they are personally responsible are safeguarded, have been managed with propriety and regularity, and use of public funds represents value for money.

14.3 Recognising the governance arrangements in place within the organisation, the NIFRS Accounting Officer will arrange for their written assurance to be discussed at the NIFRS Audit, Risk & Governance Committee and presented to the NIFRS Board prior to submission to the Department where possible. If not possible, or practicable, the Chair of the ALB Board should have sight of the assurance statement, prior to being submitted to the Department.

14.4 The NIFRS Chair will provide written confirmation that the NIFRS Accounting Officer's formal assurance has been considered by the Board and is reflective of NIFRS' current position.

14.5 In addition to the NIFRS Accounting Officer's written assurance, the Department will take assurance from the following key aspects of NIFRS' own governance framework:

- Annual Review of Board Effectiveness;

- Completion of Board Appraisals which confirm Board member effectiveness;
- Internal Audit assurance and External Quality Assessment of the Internal Audit function;
- Externally audited Annual Report and Accounts, reviewed/considered by the NIFRS Audit, Risk & Governance Committee.

## **15 Board Effectiveness**

15.1 The NIFRS Chair will ensure that the NIFRS Board undertakes an annual review of Board Effectiveness<sup>1</sup> which encompasses committees established by the Board.

15.2 The Chair will discuss the outcome of the annual review of Board Effectiveness with the lead official to ensure a partnership approach to any improvements identified. This will inform the annual programme of Board training/development and discussions in respect of Board composition and succession planning.

15.3 In line with any parameters set out in founding (or other) legislation, the Chair in conjunction with the Department, and Ministers where appropriate, will consider the size and composition of the NIFRS Board, proportionate to the size and complexity of NIFRS and keep this under review.

15.4 In addition to the annual review of Board Effectiveness NIFRS will undertake an externally facilitated review of Board effectiveness at least once every three years covering the performance of the Board, its Committees and individual Board members. The Chair will liaise with the Department to identify a suitably skilled facilitator for the external review (this can be a peer review and should be proportionate) and will share the findings/outcome report with the Department on completion of the review.

---

<sup>1</sup> NIAO Good Practice Guide on Board Effectiveness

## **16 Board Appraisals**

- 16.1 The Chair of NIFRS will conduct an annual appraisal in respect of each Board member which will also inform the annual programme of Board training/development. The Chair will engage with the Chief Fire & Rescue Officer/lead official as appropriate on improvements identified through the appraisal process and the annual training/development programme.
- 16.2 The Chair's annual appraisal will be completed by the Director of Public Inquiries and Public Safety (PIPS) within the Department. The appraisal will take account of the Key Characteristics of a good chairperson (particularly for the Chair to have well developed interpersonal skills) set out in the NIAO Good Practice Guide on Board Effectiveness available on the NIAO website. There will be close engagement between the Chair and the lead official on improvements identified through the appraisal process.

## **17 Internal Audit Assurance**

- 17.1 NIFRS is required to establish and maintain arrangements for an internal audit function that operates in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). DoH must be satisfied with the competence and qualifications of the Head of Internal Audit and that the requirements for approving appointments are in accordance with PSIAS.
- 17.2 NIFRS utilise BSO's Internal Audit services. BSO Internal Audit is PSIAS compliant and based on an overarching Service Level Agreement and Memorandum of Understanding with the Department, BSO discharges functions, such as Internal Audit, to NIFRS, on behalf of DoH.
- 17.3 NIFRS will provide its internal audit strategy, periodic audit plans and annual audit report, including the Head of Internal Audit's opinion on risk management, control and governance to the Department. NIFRS will ensure DoH's internal audit team have complete right of access to all relevant records. This applies whether the internal audit function is provided in-house or is contracted out.



17.4 NIFRS will ensure regular, periodic self-assessments of the internal audit function in line with PSIAS and will share these with the Department. NIFRS will also liaise with the Department on the External Quality Assessment (EQA) of the internal audit function which (in line with PSIAS) is required to be conducted at least once every five years by a qualified independent assessor. The current arrangement for NIFRS Internal Audit will be led by the Head of Internal Audit at BSO.

17.5 NIFRS will alert the Department to any less than satisfactory audit reports at the earliest opportunity on an ongoing basis. NIFRS will also alert the Department to a less than satisfactory annual opinion from the Head of Internal Audit at the earliest opportunity. NIFRS and the Department will then engage closely on actions required to address the less than satisfactory opinion to move NIFRS to a satisfactory position as soon as possible.

17.6 The Department will take assurance from the fact that NIFRS has met the requirements of PSIAS and has a satisfactory annual opinion from the Head of Internal Audit as part of its overall assurance assessment.

## **18 Externally Audited Annual Report and Accounts**

18.1 NIFRS is required to prepare an Annual Report and Accounts in line with the Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM) issued by the Department of Finance (DoF) and the specific Accounts Direction issued by DoH, and in accordance with the deadlines specified.

18.2 The Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) will arrange to audit NIFRS' annual accounts and will issue an independent opinion on the accounts. The C&AG passes the accounts to DoH who shall lay/present/deposit them before the NI Assembly together with NIFRS' annual report.

18.3 The C&AG will also provide a Report to Those Charged with Governance (RTTCWG) to NIFRS which will be shared with the Department.

18.4 NIFRS will alert the Department to any likely qualification of the accounts at the earliest opportunity. In the event of a qualified audit opinion or significant issues reported in the RTTCWG the Department will engage with NIFRS on actions required to address the qualification/significant issues.

18.5 The Department will take assurance from the external audit process and an unqualified position as part of its overall assurance assessment.

18.6 The C&AG may carry out examinations into the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which NIFRS has used its resources in discharging its functions. The C&AG may also carry out thematic examinations that encompass the functions of NIFRS.

18.7 For audit and any other examinations, the C&AG has statutory access to documents as provided for under Articles 3 and 4 of the Audit and Accountability (Northern Ireland) Order 2003.

18.8 Where making payment of a grant, or drawing up a contract, NIFRS should ensure that it includes a clause which makes the grant or contract conditional upon the recipient or contractor providing access to the C&AG in relation to documents relevant to the transaction. Where subcontractors are likely to be involved, it should also be made clear that the requirements extend to them.

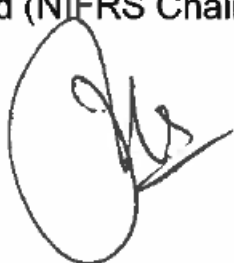
# Signatories

---

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service and the Department of Health agree to work in partnership with each other in line with the NI Code of Good Practice **'Partnerships between Departments and Arm's-Length Bodies'** and the arrangements set out in this Agreement.

Signed (NIFRS Chair)

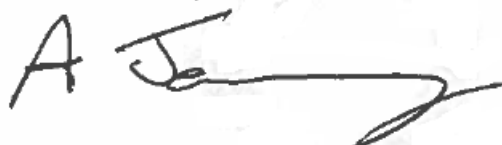
Date

 9/ April / 2024

Signed (NIFRS Chief Executive)

Date

9 April 2024



Signed (Department of Health – [at least Senior Lead Official])

Date



10/04/2024

# Annex 1 – Key Legislation & Powers

---

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) established by three pieces of primary legislation -

[The Fire and Rescue Services \(Northern Ireland\) Order 2006 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

This established NIFRS as an entity and placed a statutory obligation on NIFRS to fight fire; to respond to road traffic collisions; to train and equip staff; along with a requirement to focus on fire safety prevention and education.

[The Fire Safety Regulations \(Northern Ireland\) 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

This shifted focus away from the 'prescriptive' nature of older fire safety legislation to a more risk-based approach.

[The Fire and Rescue Services \(Emergencies\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2011 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

This extended NIFRS' role to include statutory responsibility for Chemical, Biological, Radiation and Nuclear (CBRN); Search and Rescue (SAR); serious flooding; and serious transport incidents.

## **Powers Extended by Legislation –**

Articles 18 – 21 of the Fire & Rescue Services (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 gives the following specific powers to NIFRS and their Officers -

### **Powers of fire and rescue officers in an emergency, etc.**

Article 18—

- (1) A fire and rescue officer being on duty, may do anything he reasonably believes to be necessary—
  - (a) If he reasonably believes a fire to have broken out or to be about to break out, for the purpose of extinguishing or preventing the fire or protecting life or property;
  - (b) If he reasonably believes a road traffic accident to have occurred, for the

- purpose of rescuing persons or protecting them from serious harm;
- (c) If he reasonably believes an emergency of another kind to have occurred, for the purpose of carrying out any function conferred on the Board in relation to the emergency; and
  - (d) For the purpose of preventing or limiting damage to property resulting from action taken as mentioned in sub-paragraph (a), (b) or (c).
- (2) In particular, a fire and rescue officer may under paragraph (1)–
- (a) Enter premises, by force if necessary, without the consent of the owner or occupier of the premises;
  - (b) Move or break into a vehicle without the consent of its owner;
  - (c) Close a road;
  - (d) Stop and regulate traffic; and
  - (e) Restrict the access of persons to premises

### **Powers of authorised officers in relation to obtaining information**

#### Article 19 —

- (1) Subject to paragraph (3), an authorised officer may at any reasonable time enter premises for the purpose of obtaining information needed for the carrying out of the Board's functions under Article 5, 6 or 7.
- (2) In this Article and Articles 20 to 22, “authorised officer” means a fire and rescue officer who is authorised in writing by the Chief Fire and Rescue Officer for the purposes of this Article and Article 20.
- (3) An authorised officer may not under paragraph (1)–
  - (a) Enter premises by force; or
  - (b) Demand admission to premises occupied as a private dwelling unless 24 hours' notice in writing has first been given to the occupier of the dwelling.
- (4) If, on the application of an authorised officer, a lay magistrate is satisfied–
  - (a) That–
    - (i) It is necessary for the officer to enter premises for the purposes of paragraph (1); and
    - (ii) The officer is unable to do so, or is likely to be unable to do so, otherwise than by force, he may issue a warrant authorising the officer to enter the premises by force at any reasonable time; or
  - (b) That it is necessary for the officer to enter premises for the purposes of paragraph (1) without giving notice as required by paragraph (3)(b), he

may issue a warrant authorising the officer to enter the premises at any time (by force if necessary).

- (5) If an authorised officer exercises a power of entry by virtue of this Article, he may—
  - (a) Take onto the premises any other persons, and any equipment, that he considers necessary; and
  - (b) Require a person present on the premises to provide him with any facilities, information, documents or records, or other assistance, that he may reasonably request.
- (6) An authorised officer exercising a power of entry by virtue of this Article shall, if so required, produce evidence of his authorisation under paragraph (2), and any warrant under paragraph (4)(a) or (b) —
  - (a) Before entering the premises, or
  - (b) At any time before leaving the premises.

### **Powers of authorised officers in relation to investigating fires**

Article 20 —

- (1) An authorised officer may, at any reasonable time (by force if necessary), enter premises in which there has been a fire for the purpose of investigating—
  - (a) What caused the fire; or
  - (b) Why it progressed as it did.
- (2) If an authorised officer exercises a power of entry by virtue of this Article, he may—
  - (a) Take onto the premises any other persons, and any equipment, that he considers necessary;
  - (b) Inspect and copy any documents or records on the premises or remove them from the premises;
  - (c) Carry out any inspections, measurements and tests in relation to the premises or an article or substance found on the premises, that he considers necessary;
  - (d) Take samples of an article or substance found on the premises (but not so as to destroy it or damage it unless it is necessary to do so for the purpose of the investigation);
  - (e) Dismantle an article found on the premises (but not so as to destroy it or

- damage it unless it is necessary to do so for the purpose of the investigation);
- (f) Take possession of an article or substance found on the premises and retain it for as long as is necessary for the purpose of—
    - (i) Examining it and doing anything he has power to do under subparagraph (c) or (e);
    - (ii) Ensuring that it is not tampered with before his examination of it is completed; or
    - (iii) Ensuring that it is available for use as evidence in proceedings for an offence relevant to the investigation; and
  - (g) Require a person present on the premises to provide him with any facilities, information, documents or records, or other assistance, that he may reasonably request.
- (3) An authorised officer exercising a power of entry by virtue of this Article shall, if so required, produce evidence of his authorisation under Article 19(2)—
- (a) Before entering the premises; or
  - (b) At any time before leaving the premises.
- (4) If an authorised officer exercises the power in paragraph (2)(d), he shall—
- (a) Leave a notice at the premises with a responsible person (or, if that is impracticable, fix the notice in a prominent position at the premises) giving particulars of the article or substance and stating that he has taken a sample of it; and
  - (b) If it is practicable to do so, give to a responsible person at the premises a portion of the sample marked in a manner sufficient to identify it.
- (5) If an authorised officer exercises the power in paragraph (2)(f), he shall leave a notice at the premises with a responsible person (or, if that is impracticable, fix the notice in a prominent position at the premises) giving particulars of the article or substance and stating that he has taken possession of it.

### **Securing of Premises**

Article 21 - An authorised officer who, by virtue of Article 19 or 20, enters premises –

(a) Which are unoccupied; or  
(b) From which the occupier is temporarily absent,  
shall on departure ensure that all reasonable measures have been taken to  
leave the premises as effectively secured against unauthorised entry as he  
found them.



## Annex 2 – Engagement Plan

Good engagement is one of the key principles in the Partnership Code, underpinning the other principles of: Leadership; Purpose; Assurance; and Value.

As laid out in the Code, partnerships work well when relationships between departments and ALBs are open, transparent, honest, constructive and based on trust and when there is mutual understanding of each other’s objectives and clear expectations about the terms of engagement.

Engagement Plan 2024/25		
Assurances		
<i>Add details of the timetable for submission of key assurance sources and any other assurance related activity</i>		
Action	Date	Lead Departmental/ALB Official
Outcome of the Review of Board Effectiveness	Annual review with an externally facilitated review at least once every three years	NIFRS Chair  DoH Director of Public Inquiries and Public Safety
Planning for the externally facilitated review of Board Effectiveness	Externally facilitated review at least once every three years	NIFRS Chair  DoH Director of Public Inquiries and Public Safety
Board Appraisals and planned training/development for Board members	Following the end of the Business year.	NIFRS Chair  DoH Director of Public Inquiries and Public Safety

		DoH Director of Public Appointments
Chair Appraisal	Following the end of the Business year. After Board Appraisals have been completed by the Chair and the annual Review of Board Effectiveness has concluded	DoH Director of Public Appointments  DoH Director of Public Inquiries and Public Safety  DoH Permanent Secretary
Departmental Attendance at Audit Risk and Governance Committee	Attendance as observer 1xpa	DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Audit Committee papers (including draft minutes) for each meeting as and when issued to Committee members)	For information 5 days working days in advance of meeting	NIFRS Director  DoH Sponsor Branch/ Head of Sponsor Branch
Departmental Attendance at Board Meeting	Attendance as observer 1xpa	DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Board papers (including draft minutes) for each meeting	For information 5 days working days in advance of meeting	NIFRS Director  DoH Sponsor Branch / Head of Sponsor Branch
Assurance Statement	Bi-annual mid and end year	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsorship of Public Safety and Inquiries Branch  DoH Head of ALB Governance
Draft Governance Statement	Annual - end year	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch

		DoH Head of ALB Governance
Annual Report and Accounts	Annual	NIFRC CFRO DoH Director of Finance
Head of Internal Audit Annual report/Opinion	Annual	NIFRS CFRO BSO Head of Internal Audit DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Internal Audit Strategy and Plans	Annual	NIFRS CFRO BSO Head of Internal Audit DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Internal Audit External Quality Assessment	To be conducted at least once every five years by an independent assessor	NIFRS CFRO BSO Head of Internal Audit
Ground Clearing Meetings	Bi-Annual	NIFRS CFRO DoH NIFRS Sponsor GD3 DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Accountability Meetings	Mid and end year	DoH Permanent Secretary DoH NIFRS Sponsor GD3 NIFRS Chair NIFRS CFRO
Internal Audit reports with less than satisfactory assurance	Once - for consideration/ comment/ approval (where noted)	NIFRS CFRO DoH Policy Leads DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Annual Report, with the draft submitted to the Department two weeks before the publication date ( <i>detailed timetable for the annual accounts, SIC etc is set by Finance Directorate</i> )	Annually - For information	NIFRS CFRO  DoH Finance Director

Anti-Fraud Policy	Once, and then when revised - for information	NIFRS CFRO DoH Finance Director DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Assurance Framework	Once, and then when revised - for information	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Code of Conduct for board members	Once, and then when revised - for information	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Code of Practice for staff	Once, and then when revised - for information	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Complaints procedure	Once, and then when revised - for information	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Corporate Plan (including the Business Plan)	Annually - for consideration/ comment/ approval (where noted)	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Corporate Risk Register	Bi-annual - for consideration/ comment/ approval (where noted)	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Equality scheme	Once, and then when revised - for information	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Fraud Response Plan	Once, and then when revised - for information	NIFRS CFRO DoH Finance Director
Grievance and Disciplinary procedures	Once, and then when revised - for information	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Head of Internal Audit's end-of-year and mid-year opinions on risk management, control and governance	Annually - for consideration/ comment/ approval (where noted)	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Register of board members' interests	Annually - For information	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Whistle-blowing	Once, and then	NIFRS CFRO

procedures	when revised - for information	DoH Head of Corporate Governance Unit DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
<b>Budget Management</b>		
<i>Add details of the information and returns to be provided.</i>		
<b>Item and Purpose</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Lead Departmental/ALB Official</b>
Monthly Financial Management Returns	Monthly	NIFRS Director / Head of FMU
DoF Commissioned Monitoring Rounds	June, October, and January (work commences the previous month)	DoH Head of Financial Management Unit / NIFRS
Business cases outside APB delegated limits or falling within the definition of Novel, Contentious or repercussive	Ad hoc	DoH Head of Finance Policy and Accountability / NIFRS
Write off outside delegated limits or which could be considered Novel, Contentious or repercussive	Ad hoc	DoH Head of Finance Policy and Accountability Unit / NIFRS
Clinical Negligence claims, EL/OL Claims outside delegated limits or which could be considered Novel, Contentious or repercussive	Ad hoc	DoH Head of Finance Policy and Accountability Unit / NIFRS
Test Drilling samples	Interim - November and Final – March	DoH Head of Finance Policy and Accountability Unit / NIFRS
FAU circulars and memos in relation to Year – End Accounts production*	Year – End (March)	DoH Head of Financial Accounting Unit / NIFRS

Circulars – FD letters*	Ad hoc	DoH Head of Financial Accounting Unit / NIFRS
Capital Spend Returns	Monthly	DoH Head of Capital Resources Unit / NIFRS
Capital Resource Limits (CRL) Returns	Ad hoc	DoH Head of Capital Resources Unit / NIFRS
ISNI Delivery Tracking System Updates	Monthly	DoH Head of Capital Resources Unit / NIFRS
Disposals	Bi-annually	DoH Head of Capital Resources Unit / NIFRS
General Capital Outturn	Annually	DoH Head of Capital Resources Unit / NIFRS
Capital Budget Exercises/10 Year Plan	Ad hoc	DoH Head of Capital Resources Unit / NIFRS
DoF Commissioned Monitoring Rounds – Capital	June, October, and January (work commences the previous month)	DoH Head of Financial Management Unit / NIFRS
Ad Hoc Requests	Unknown/dependent on timescales imposed	All Finance/NIFRS

### Board Appointments

Add details of any engagement related to Public Appointment exercises

Activity	Date	Lead Departmental/ALB Official
Public Appointments, new appointments, reappointment, or extension activity	Annual Workplan / as required	DoH Head of Public Appointments
Succession Planning	Annually	DoH Head of Public Appointments
Completion of Skills Audits for Board members	As required	NIFRS Chair
Completion of Skills Audits for Chairs	As required	DoH Head of Public Appointments

### Chief Executive Recruitment

Add details of any engagement related to the recruitment of a new Chief Executive (if anticipated during the year ahead). ALBs should engage with the Department at an early stage in the event of the recruitment of a new Chief Executive. While recognising the role of the Board as employer, the Department will work closely with the ALB in the recruitment and selection process in line with extant guidance.

Activity	Date	Lead Departmental/ALB Official
Approval to recruit CFRO	In advance of proposed recruitment	NIFRS Chair
CFRO acknowledges, in writing, receipt of a formal letter of designation as Accounting Officer defining the role and responsibilities of this position	As required	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
CFRO has, within six months and preferably within three months of appointment, attended an accounting officer training course run by Chief Executives Forum	Between 3 and 6 months of appointment	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Refresher Accounting Officer Training is undertaken at least every six years	Every 6 years	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Sponsor Branch

### Collaborative Engagement with NIFRS and Sponsor Team

To build and support an understanding of the role and responsibilities of the NIFRS and Sponsor teams in supporting the work of NIFRS. To promote a culture of 'no surprises' by enabling timely exchange on various directions of travel.

Activity	Date	Lead Departmental/ALB Official
Informal reviews between Sponsor Team and NIFRS Chair	As diary commitments allow, but at least once	NIFRS Chair DoH Head of Sponsor Branch

	every 2 months	
Informal reviews between Sponsor Team and NIFRS CFRO	As diary commitments allow, but at least once every 2 months	NIFRS Chair DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Informal reviews between Sponsor Branch and NIFRS Directors/ Directorate teams	Ad hoc	DoH Sponsor Branch NIFRS Directors/ Directorate Team
Informal visits to NIFRS sites	Ad hoc As opportunity allows avail of opportunities to visit sites to better understand the work of NIFRS	Members of DoH Sponsor Branch  As appropriate, relevant NIFRS members
<b>Other</b>		
<b>Item and Purpose</b>	<b>Submission Date</b>	<b>Lead Departmental/ALB Official</b>
Accounting Officer - Fitness to Act as Accounting Officer	Annual request from the departmental Accounting Officer	DoH Director of ALB Governance Unit DoH Head of Sponsor Branch
Fraud Reporting	Immediate reporting of all frauds (proven or suspected including attempted fraud	NIFRS CFRO DoH Finance Director
Whistleblowing cases/ Speaking Up/Raising Concerns.	Ad hoc	NIFRS CFRO DoH Head of Corporate Governance Unit
Media management protocols – independence of NIFRS to engage with media/announcements of corporate and policy communications significant to NIFRS -	Ad hoc	NIFRS Head of Communications DoH Head of Sponsor Branch DoH Press Office



arrangements to share press releases where relevant – ensure no surprises.		
<b>Review of the Partnership Agreement</b>		
<b>Item and Purpose</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Lead Departmental/ALB Official</b>
Light touch review of the Partnership Agreement	Schedule following the end of the Business Year	DoH Head of Sponsor Branch  NIFRS Chair  NIFRS CFRO
Formal review of the Partnership Agreement	To be conducted once every three years	DoH Permanent Secretary  DoH Head of Sponsor Branch  NIFRS Chair  NIFRS CFRO

## Annex 3 – Delegated Authority

---

NIFRS shall obtain the Department's prior written approval before:

- entering into any undertaking to incur any expenditure that falls outside the delegations or which is not provided for in the ALB's annual budget as approved by the Department;
- incurring expenditure for any purpose that is or might be considered novel or contentious, or which has or could have significant future cost implications;
- making any significant change in the scale of operation or funding of any initiative or particular scheme previously approved by the Department;
- making any change of policy or practice which has wider financial implications that might prove repercussive or which might significantly affect the future level of resources required; or
- carrying out policies that go against the principles, rules, guidance and advice in Managing Public Money Northern Ireland.

The Department's internal framework of delegated authority applies to NIFRS.

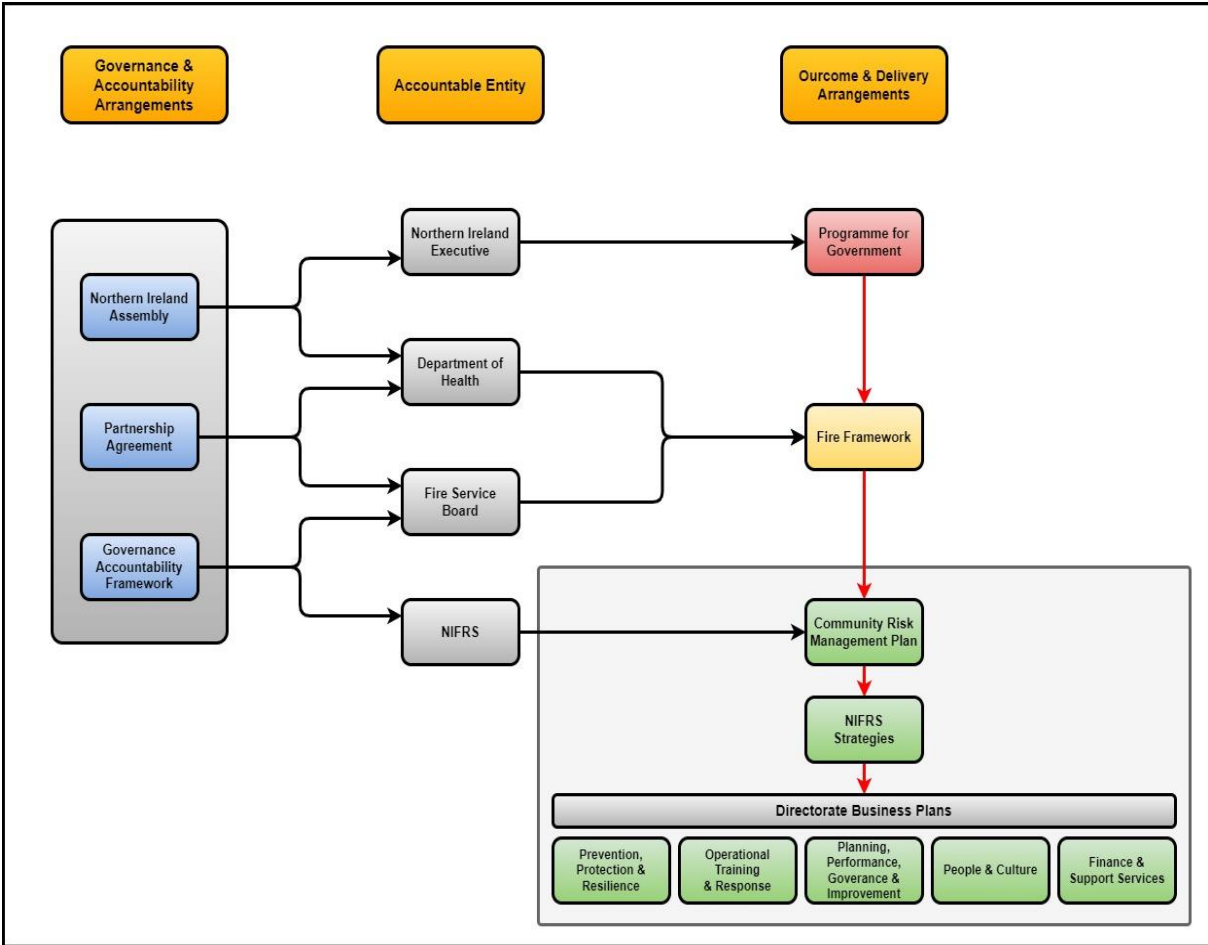
[\[HSC\(F\) 33-2023 - Revised HSC & NIFRS Delegated Limits and requirements for Departmental / DoF approval\]](#).

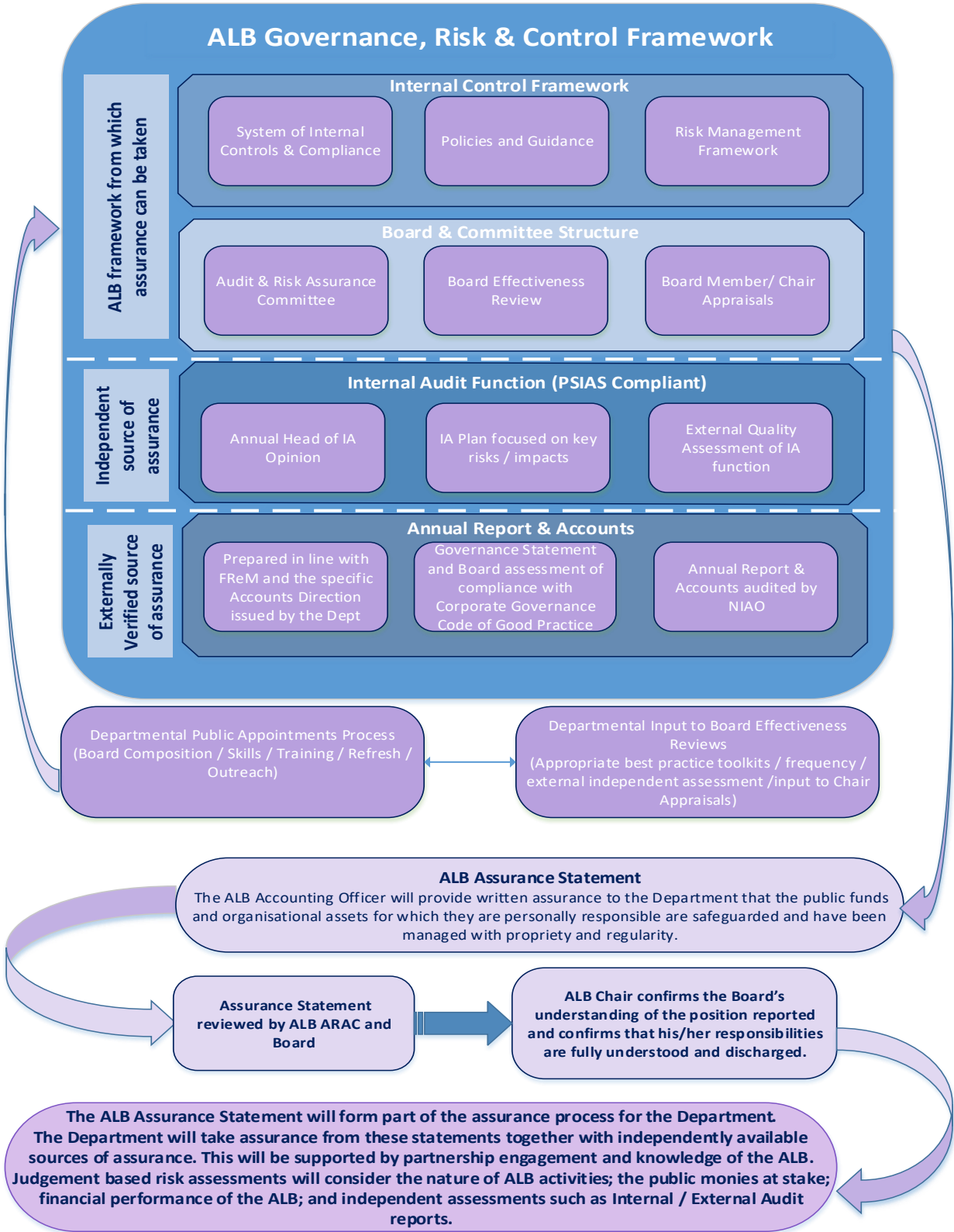
There are no other specific delegated authorities applicable to NIFRS.

***These delegations shall not be altered without the prior agreement of the department and, where applicable, DoF.***

# Annex 4 – Assurance Framework

## Overarching Governance Arrangements -





## Annex 5 – Concerns/Complaints in respect of Board Members

---

In line with the NI Code of Good Practice and the arrangements in this Partnership Agreement the approach to concerns/complaints raised in respect of NIFRS Board Members should be transparent and collaborative. The principle of early and open engagement is important, with the Department made aware of any concerns/complaints as soon as practicable.

While Board Members are Public Appointees/office holders rather than NIFRS employees an NIFRS employee may utilise NIFRS' grievance procedure/other HR procedure to raise a complaint against a Board Member. The NIFRS employee raising the grievance should expect this to be handled in line with NIFRS' HR procedures.

Concerns/complaints might also be raised through:

- Raising Concerns arrangements;
- Complaints processes;
- Directly with NIFRS or the Department.

Where a concern/complaint is received within NIFRS in respect of an individual Board Member this should be provided to the NIFRS Chair who should notify the Department at the outset in order that lead responsibility for handling the complaint/concern is clear in advance.

Where a concern/complaint relates to the NIFRS Chair, NIFRS should notify the Department at the outset for the Department to determine the approach to handling the complaint/concern.

Differences of view in relation to matters which fall within the Board's responsibilities are a matter for the Board to resolve through consensus based decision making in the best interests of NIFRS.

Exceptionally a concern/complaint may be raised by a Board Member about a fellow Board Member or a senior member of NIFRS staff. The NIFRS Chair should notify the Department at the outset to ensure that arrangements for handling the concern/complaint are clear. The Department may determine that it should make arrangements to deal with the concern/complaint. This will be agreed at the outset.

Arrangements for concerns/complaints in respect of Board members should be reflected in all relevant procedures, including Standing Orders and Board Operating Frameworks.

# Annex 6 – Applicable Guidance

---

The following guidance is applicable to NIFRS

## **Guidance issued by the Department of Finance**

- Managing Public Money NI
- Public Bodies – A Guide for NI Departments
- Corporate Governance in central government departments – code of good practice
- DoF Risk Management Framework
- HMT Orange Book
- The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook
- Public Sector Internal Audit Standards
- Accounting Officer Handbook – HMT Regularity, Propriety and Value for Money
- Better Business Cases NI
- Dear Accounting Officer Letters
- Dear Finance Director Letters
- Dear Consolidation Officer and Dear Consolidation Manager Letters
- The Consolidation Officer Letter of Appointment
- Government Financial Reporting Manual (FReM)
- Guidance for preparation and publication of annual report and accounts
- Procurement Guidance

## **Other Guidance and Best Practice**

- Specific guidance issued by the Department
- EU Delegations
- Recommendations made by the NI Audit Office/NI Assembly Public Accounts Committee
- NIAO Good Practice Guides
- Guidance issued by the Executive's Asset Management Unit
- NI Public Services Ombudsman guidance

# Annex 7 – Role of the Minister

---

## Role of the Minister

The Chair of NIFRS is responsible to the Minister. Communication between the Board and the Minister should normally be through the Chair.

The departmental Accounting Officer is responsible for advising the relevant Minister on several issues including NIFRS' objectives and targets, budgets and performance.

In addition to being answerable to the Assembly as laid out in paragraph 2.4, the Minister is also responsible for:

- Setting the strategic direction and overall policies and priorities for NIFRS as reflected in the PfG – these will translate into the Fire Framework for Northern Ireland;
- Approving NIFRS' Business Plan;
- Setting NIFRS' budget; and
- Appointment of non-executive board members. The Minister may also be involved in considering the size and composition of the NIFRS Board – see para 15.3.



# Annex 8 – Role of His Majesty’s Fire Service Inspectorate, Scotland

---

## **Role of His Majesty’s Fire Service Inspectorate, Scotland**

The His Majesty’s (HM) Fire Service Inspectorate, Scotland, plays a unique role in supporting both the Department of Health (DoH), and the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) in delivering public safety in NI.

The Chief of HM Fire Service Inspectorate, Scotland supports the technical role of fire advisor to the Department in policy formation and related considerations.

At present, there is no independent fire inspectorate service in Northern Ireland. HM Fire Service Inspectorate (HMFSI) led on the recent independent inspection of NIFRS, publishing a report in September 2023, which will help drive improvement for the Service, consequently improving the safety of all communities in Northern Ireland.

The strong working professional collaborative relationship fostered by DoH, NIFRS and HMFSI supports regional and UK alignment with best practice and standards in public safety.

# Annex 9 – Code of Best Practice

---



[NI Code of Good Practice v3 \(300323\).pdf \(finance-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

## Connect with us



028 9266 4221



reception@nifrs.org



www.nifrs.org



@NIFRSOFFICIAL



@NIFRSOFFICIAL

*Safer  
Together*