

GIBRALTAR

Personnel from the Defence Fire and Rescue Service have been officially transferred from the Ministry of Defence to the Government of Gibraltar.

The new service will be known as the Gibraltar Airport Fire and Rescue Service (AFRS), following a memorandum of understanding signed recently by the MOD and the Gibraltar Government.

On 1 October 2015 the Chief Minister Fabian Picardo, Commander British Forces Gibraltar Commodore Ian McGhie, CFO Phil Salt and DCFO Joel Gray all attended a Vesting Day Ceremony at RAF Gibraltar to mark the occasion.

Mr Picardo said: "After many years of trying, we have today transferred the Defence Fire & Rescue Service from the MOD to a wholly owned company of Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar. I promised the great people who make up the DFRS and their representatives from Unite that this would happen and we have achieved it."

AFRS is jointly funded by the Government and MoD and will continue to provide fire cover at Gibraltar Airport during its operational hours as its primary role but will also act in support of the Gibraltar Fire and Rescue Service and MOD as and when required.

Commodore McGhie also addressed attendees at the Vesting Day Ceremony and said: "I am delighted to be here on vesting day to witness the transfer of the provision of Airfield Fire and Rescue Services from the Ministry of Defence to Her Majesty's Government of Gibraltar."

"A lot of hard work has been undertaken by both parties in the last 12 months to fully realise this commitment. These new arrangements will support and enhance the continued development and operation of this airfield, which remains key to our collective interests."

As part of the transfer, and in consultation with Unite the Union, AFRS will now consist of two operational watches working on shifts and a number of day staff support personnel. Gibraltar Air Terminal Ltd, a Government owned company, which currently operates and manages the Air Terminal, will carry out the administrative support and facilities management of AFRS. Terence Lopez, Air Terminal Director and CEO of the AFRS said: "I am extremely pleased that this moment has finally arrived, and would like to warmly welcome the AFRS workforce. I am confident that with the professional expertise and experience that the firefighters bring with them we will be well equipped in the future to ensure that the Gibraltar AFRS will continue to provide a high standard of safety and operational capability and look forward to working with them".

The hard work of the men in the fire department and the impact their work hours have on their families were touched on in the Chief Minister's speech. Mr Picardo, who was wearing his AFRS tie with pride, said: "It's been hard work. There have been ups and downs but everyone has shown huge determination to achieve this in the best interests of all parties but, in particular, the people we rely on to ensure our safety on the runway and their families."

In addition, he thanked the families of Gibraltar's firefighters for their support and patience especially when members of the team have to work on days that most people are off, such as National Day.

Mr Picardo also said that the Government would be working together with the MOD and others like the Gibraltar Defence Police and Water Section to see whether it can also transfer those services using the blueprint of this merge.

"As 2017 approaches, I am also very conscious of the need to work to secure the jobs of all others who work for the MoD in Gibraltar and I will be raising these issues with the Minister for the Armed Forces when I meet her shortly," he said.

The Government also announced that it will shortly be going out to tender to procure new Fire Fighting Vehicles.

CFO Phil Salt in his speech referred to the fact that the transfer was made all that more memorable recognising that this year was also the 150th Anniversary of the formation of a Fire Service in Gibraltar. He went on say that the MOD itself has a long history of providing Fire & Rescue Services in Gibraltar and that he looked forward to a continued close and professional working relationship with the Government of Gibraltar, British Forces Gibraltar and RAF Gibraltar under the new governance and ownership arrangements. After the ceremony the CFO presented certificates of service to all AFRS personnel.



