

South – East Fire Improvement Partnership

Issue 3 – January 2007



Seeking best practice for the Fire & Rescue Service

Welcome to the third issue of the South-East Fire Improvement Partnership newsletter!

In this issue we focus upon best practice, what it is, where it can be found and the role SEFIP will play in making it more accessible. We also provide some feedback on the Business Planning event which took place in November and, as in previous issues, give an update on what SEFIP has been up to.

Best practice & the Fire & Rescue Service

What is best practice?

The term 'best practice' is generic and open to interpretation depending on the field in which it is being applied. 'Best practice' is often discussed, but seldom defined. We wanted to at least attempt a working definition, which is 'best practice is a method or approach which has proven to be effective in delivering a high quality product or outcome'. Examples of best practice often deliver value for money or at least an approach towards achieving it.

Best practice can take a number of different forms; it can be anything from a guidance

document published by the Department for Communities & Local Government (DCLG), to a Community Fire Safety Initiative. There is also no limit to the fields in which best practice can be found. We discuss later some of the places we have found 'best practice' examples, but the list is by no means exhaustive.

It is perhaps important to also note that seeking best practice should also not become a barrier to innovation – new ideas are as important in meeting the needs of the community as adapting good ones from other organisations.

How can best practice help drive improvement in the Fire & Rescue Service?

By seeking and adopting other organisation's best practice, it is possible to achieve a number of

Also in this issue....

- Feedback on the Business Planning Event
- Regional Business Plan: coming soon!
- What SEFIP has achieved since the last issue

outcomes. For example, much time is spent on research when developing new products or services. Assessing what is essentially already on the market will create efficiencies, even if some adaptation is required. It also tends to provide faster outcomes, at less risk of failure, a key requirement in these times rapid change.

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Who to contact for more information about SEFIP

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Audit Commission	www.audit-commission.gov.uk
DCLG	www.communities.gov.uk
IDeA	www.idea.gov.uk
LGA	www.lga.gov.uk
OGC/	www.ogc.gov.uk/
Best Practice Management	www.get-best-practice.co.uk
ORC International	www.orc.co.uk
PSBS	www.benchmarking.gov.uk
SECE	www.sece.gov.uk
BOX 1	

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Where can I find best practice?

It is important to recognise that best practice can essentially be found anywhere; it is not restricted to the Fire Service or even the public sector. In fact there is a lot to be gained in extending our searches for best practice to the private sector, particularly in areas such as procurement, finance and human resources.

In order to start making best practice more available we felt it would be beneficial to provide you with some examples of where you can find it. A list of websites where we have found examples of good practice are provided in box 1.

The **Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA)** website contains a selection of best practice documents which are organised as case studies. A particular area of relevance to FRAs is the section on Community Safety. In addition the website also contains some ideas on partnership working, and a communications discussion forum which focuses upon engaging with the community. IDeA Knowledge is also a helpful discussion tool for FRAs to discuss issues with colleagues across local government.

The National Studies Programme is conducted by the **Audit Commission** and aims to improve local public services through the independent analysis of national evidence and local practice. There are a number of different studies which have, are, or will be taking place to identify practice that works, and to highlight emerging trends. For example, this year studies have included 'Innovation in Local Government' and 'Road Safety'; next year there will be a study

examining 'Procurement through partnerships'. Further details on the National Studies Programme, such as when reports are due to be published can be found on the Audit Commission's website (see box 1 for details).

Working in partnership with its official accreditor and publisher, the **Office of Government Commerce** has launched a website which is dedicated to sharing specific best practice information. The website titled 'Best Practice Management' (see box 1 for details), contains case studies and guidance documents in 4 areas; IT Service, Project, Programme and Risk Management. Whilst this website has great benefit it is important to note that not all information is free.

The **Public Sector Benchmarking Service (PSBS)** is another source of best practice that is potentially very useful to FRAs. The website contains over 1,000 case studies as well as research documents on both Knowledge and Performance Management. In addition PSBS has the facility to link people to others who are involved in benchmarking. Registration is required to access this information however.

The **Department for Government & Local Communities (DCLG)** has produced guides to best practice in four specific areas. These include; A strategy for children & young people; Youth diversion & training in the FRS; Fire investigation & dog handling; and Working together: How to set up an arson task force. These are all available on the DCLG website.

Local Authorities such as Councils and the Police are another excellent source of best practice and there are many different places where you can source this information. For example Councils that have been awarded Beacon status are an excellent place to start, particularly if you are interested in community engagement, working in partnership, finance and Crime & Disorder Partnerships. Best practice case studies in these areas can be found on both the Local Authority's and via the IDeA's website.

This year the **Local Government Association (LGA)** set up the 'Reputation Campaign' which focuses upon the public perception of local government and how its profile can be raised. Coming out of the campaign is a service called

CommsNet which has been created to build communications and provide a forum for sharing best practice.

The **Inter Authorities Group (IAG)** is an independent officer led association of over 80 local authorities and public bodies. IAG hosts a number of events and provides a valuable forum for sharing ideas, best practice and benchmarking. A wider selection of information is also available on a Member's website; SEFIP are currently negotiating with IAG to gain corporate membership which will allow provide any member of the 9 FRAs access to the IAGs facilities.

Examples of best practice that can be used by FRSs are not exclusive to local government and public sector sources. The **Opinion Research Corporation (ORC International)** is an independent research company whose customers are both from the public and private sector. Their website contains a small but very useful selection of case studies on issues such as diversity, community engagement and finance. From time to time ORC International will also conduct benchmarking research in relation to customer satisfaction surveys.

A substantial amount of best practice can be found in FRSs and regional working groups. For example in 2005 the Regional Management Board agreed a guide to best practice on partnership working.

How will SEFIP help make best practice more accessible?

There are a number of ways in which SEFIP will help to make best practice more accessible. For example we are currently in the initial stages of developing a SEFIP website with East Sussex FRS, on which we

intend to build a library of best practice.

This newsletter also provides an ideal forum for sharing best practice; we will keep our ears to the ground and feedback any information that we think will be helpful. We would also encourage our colleagues to tell us and each other about programmes and methodology that has worked for your organisation.

What has SEFIP been Up to?

SEFIP Business Planning Event

In issue 2 we introduced the Business Planning Event which was to be the first event SEFIP had organised. On 16 November 2006 the event took place and was greatly received by all those who attended.

The aim of the day was primarily to bring workstreams together in order to produce a first draft of the RMB Business Plan and its underlying Activity Plan. In order to achieve this each workstream presented the projects that they wished to be included in the Business and/or Activity plans for the coming year. We were pleased to find that an open debate and that all attendees reported having a greater understanding or regional activity as a whole.

Feedback from the day has been very positive. One of the key issues that arose on the day was that although much work was occurring, it tended to be siloed into work-streams and was not being widely shared. It is the intention of this work-stream to facilitate sharing of information on a much wider basis.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who attended the day for their

participation.

What else has SEFIP been up to?

The Improvement Partnership is actively seeking new forums which to obtain and also share good and innovative practice. The Inter-Authorities Group is a forum for local government to which SEFIP has negotiated a corporate membership for all FRAs in the South-East. As opportunities arise, agendas will be circulated to key Members and officers in authorities.

Support to those authorities that requested direct support from the Capacity Building fund application was agreed by the SEFIP Stakeholder team at its meeting in October 2006. So far £186k of support has been drawn-down by authorities; the remainder will carry forward into the next financial year. We would like to remind you that all CBF funding has to be spent by March 2008.

The partnership is also beginning to plan the next bid for support from government, especially in the context of issues arising from the white paper for local government.

The Improvement Officer started work on 4 December 2006, and will be a valuable addition to the team, bringing with them significant experience from both the public and private sector, and also in working in partnership.