

Report No: RMB/10/07
Meeting Date: 4 April 2007
Agenda Item No: 10

REPORT TO THE SOUTH EAST FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARD

PROGRESS AGAINST PLAN APRIL 2007

KEY ISSUE/DECISION

The Regional Management Board is asked to note the progress made against the current regional business plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report sets out the progress made for the period January–March 2007 against the each of the work streams in the regional business plan. In general good progress is being made.

CONSULTATION

Consultation has taken place with the constituent FRAs in the South East Region to develop the report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to

- i. note the progress made
- ii. note the recent newsletter issued by the South East Fire Improvement Partnership (**appendix 1** refers)

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Progress against the regional business plan continues to be made as set out in the report.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS:

INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the progress made against each of the key areas in the regional business plan.

ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

Review of work streams

All work streams of the Board progressed well this year, as set out in the paragraphs below.

Procurement – Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority

The Regional Procurement Manager has been appointed, and has been engaged in a series of visits across the region. The work stream has completed a regional response to the consultation on funding options for Firebuy, which reflected concerns outlined at the previous RMB meeting.

The Regional Procurement Manager is also actively seeking in the short term significant financial savings. 3 FRAs have expressed an interest in participating in a pilot to look at the benefits of a procurement card scheme, and external support may be available to support this project. Members will be kept fully informed of progress in this area throughout the coming business year.

Human Resources – Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority

The Regional Human Resources Framework Strategy is elsewhere on this agenda, and FRAs are reminded of the need to agree the document at local level.

As part of the Capacity Building Bid, funding was made available to support work intended to assist all FRAs move to level three of the equality standard for local government by December 2008. To progress this issue, FRAs will shortly be asked to nominate themselves for slots in a regional assessment process. A South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP) newsletter has been produced to highlight the intended outcomes and process to be used. It is attached at **appendix 1** for information.

The implementation of Assessment and Development Centres (ADC) is on schedule with all services agreeing a common ADC policy and supporting Memorandum of Understanding from April 2007. A Capacity Building bid was successful and will be used to fund a dedicated regional coordinator for ADCs, helping to achieve consistency, quality assurance and value for money across the region. Work has now commenced on a single collaborative regional Strategic Manager ADC for autumn 2007.

Current issues surrounding the payment of additional responsibility allowances (ARAs) and continual professional development/long service increment issues have dominated the HR work stream in the last quarter. Informal guidance has been received which appears to suggest that ARAs are a matter for local consultation with accredited representatives. Work is progressing to assess the current position in the region in relation as to what constitutes an activity for which an ARA may be paid in each FRA. It appears likely that this will have a financial implication for all FRAs.

Training - Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority

The main outcome from the training work stream this year has been the regional review of training. External consultant support was used to consider the form and function of training delivery across all nine FRAs in the region, with a view to seeking efficiencies. The review of training was considered by the RMB at its meeting in October. An implementation plan is currently being developed and is reflected in the aspirations for the coming year. Some projects are supported by capacity building funding.

Following an extensive selection procedure, a contract has been successfully let for training for technical fire safety staff on a regional basis. This has delivered significant cost savings to FRAs in the south-east compared to previous working arrangements.

Regional Control Centre & Firelink – West Sussex Fire and Rescue Authority

In November 2006 the Government, as is normal practice in major procurement projects, conducted a Gateway Review (Investment Decision). The overall status of the FiReControl project is Amber – i.e. the project should go forward.

The initial 3 bidders for the Infrastructure Contract (mobilising system) has been reduced to 2 and contract award occurred in March 2007. Work has commenced on the South East Regional Control Centre building in Fareham, Hampshire and is expected to be at practical completion by mid 2008.

The Local Authority Controlled Company (LACC) is nearing formation. This company will run the Control Centre on behalf of the nine FRAs in the SE Region. The company will aid the region, particularly with regards to Human Resources issues.

Communities and Local Government (CLG) has now released a revised version of the transition plan. This version now has over 1600 activities that FRAs have to complete prior to migration to the RCC. There is another version expected on contract award which will give definitive dates. CLG has provided some additional funds to assist each FRA to complete the work involved with transition.

Media and Communications – East Sussex Fire and Rescue Authority

Initial work has begun to develop a regional improvement website, which will be hosted by East Sussex FRA. This simple site will provide an on-line resource for sharing good practice across the region as well as events, training courses and documentation related to the region.

Work will soon begin to update the RMB's communication strategy to reflect current issues, building on the solid plan developed two years ago by Surrey FRA.

Improvement – Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority

The Improvement Team has continued to progress the sharing of good practice across the region. It has made briefing notes on national and regional events it has attended available to all Chief Fire Officers (CFOs). It also made available 8 places at a recent Local Government Association Improvement and Innovation conference.

The development of a peer review process was a key element of the RMB's capacity building bid. The intention is to run a pilot scheme on the issue of improvement support. After the process has been proven, reviews will be at nil cost to FRAs in the initial stages, as capacity building funding will be used.

The Inter-Authorities Group is a forum for local government to which SEFIP has negotiated a corporate membership. FRAs have been invited to attend future sessions and information will be fed back to constituent authorities. The next agenda focuses on the work of the Lifting the Burdens Task Force, and the development of the new Comprehensive Area Assessments.

Significant work has been undertaken by SEFIP and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) to develop a simple transferable piece of work which will assist in moving forward regional working where appropriate, but also be complimentary to local training programmes. It is hoped to roll this event out in the near future.

Resilience – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Authority

The South East Coordination team has been active, meeting and speaking with asset managers and crews from across the region. For example, the First Mass Decontamination User Group was held in January 2007 and proved a successful event. User Groups are to be used sparingly, but sufficient to support each FRAs achieve the 'steady state' requirements of the National project.

The training for Powered Respirator Protective Suits (PRPS) operators is progressing well, with all FRAs within the South East reporting that they will be able to meet the March deadline for completion of the initial requirement of personnel. The new suits have many advantages, for example, reduced physiological impact and improved wearer comfort and mobility,

3 FRAs have received their respective Detection Identification and Monitoring (DIM) vehicles and are at various stages of training. A full programme of refresher training for existing DIM officers as well as a number of 'start from new' courses has been produced for the next training year at the Fire Service College.

Future plans are to ensure that resources (staff and appliances) are used effectively across the region, whilst maintaining the political accountability of the constituent FRAs. This means that opportunities to look at cross-border working arrangements, location of non-New Dimensions equipment, and the use of incident command level four staff will be taken as they arise. Members of the RMB will be fully informed as this work stream progresses.

IMPLICATIONS

Good progress is being made against regional work areas. To maintain progress it is important that progress is closely monitored and reported to Members and senior officers on a regular basis, and at a level that is appropriate to the role of the recipient.

CONCLUSION

Members are asked to

- i. note the progress made
- ii. note the recent newsletter issued by the South East Fire Improvement Partnership (**appendix 1** refers) on the equality and diversity assessment.