

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
SOUTH EAST FIRE & RESCUE SERVICES
REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARD
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 4 APRIL 2007 AT 11.00 HRS
AT SURREY FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE HQ, REIGATE**

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Regional Management Board at its next meeting.

Members:

- * Cllr B Abraham Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, Isle of Wight Fire Authority
- * Cllr L Barnard Cabinet Member for Public Protection, West Sussex County Council
- * Cllr Dr P Bryant Chairman, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority
- * Cllr M F Cartwright Chairman, Hampshire Fire & Rescue, Fire Authority
- * Cllr B Cope Chairman, Kent & Medway Fire & Rescue Authority
- * Cllr Mrs J Heathcoat Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Oxfordshire County Council
- * Cllr M Murphy Chairman, East Sussex Fire Authority
- * Cllr D Rowlands Chairman, Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Combined Fire Authority
- Cllr Mrs C Stevens Executive Member for Community Safety, Surrey County Council
- * Cllr M Neighbour Substitute Member for Surrey

* = Present

In Attendance:

- CFO J Bonney Hampshire
- CFO I Cox Royal Berkshire
- CFO S Myers Surrey
- CFO J Parry Oxfordshire
- CFO D Prichard East Sussex
- Actg CFO P Street Isle of Wight
- DCFO B Feeley Kent
- DCFO C Hedger Buckinghamshire
- DCFO C Sear West Sussex
- ACO C Kerr Kent
- Sue Klein East Sussex

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Mrs Judith Heathcoat was welcomed to her first meeting of the Regional Management Board, having been appointed on 3 April 2007 as Cabinet Member for Community Safety for Oxfordshire, in place of Councillor Ray Jelf. Members asked Councillor Mrs Heathcoat to pass on their thanks to Councillor Jelf for his work on the Board over the last three years.

Councillor Maurice Neighbour (Surrey) was welcomed to the meeting as a substitute member in the absence of Councillor Mrs Christine Stevens; along with DCFO Cliff Sear, substituting for CFO Burrell (West Sussex) and DCFO Bill Feeley, substituting for CFO Hendry (Kent).

It was also noted that CFO Steve Myers (Surrey) would be retiring at the end of April, and that this would be his last RMB meeting. Members wished him a long and happy retirement and thanked him for all his work over the years and for hosting meetings of the Board. CFO Myers thanked members for their support and wished the Board every success in the future.

12/07 CHAIRMAN'S REPORT (Item 1)

Councillor Barnard (West Sussex) presented his Chairman's Report which detailed the work undertaken by the Board over the last two years. Consistent policies had been introduced across the region in relation to sickness and discipline as well as good practice guides to community fire safety and working in partnership. A review of training provision across the South East had also been completed.

Councillor Barnard had enjoyed his year as Chairman and thanked his colleagues on the Regional Management Board for their commitment during the last twelve months, as well as the officers and staff of the South East Fire and Rescue Services for their professionalism, resilience and continued effort.

13/07 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN 2007/08 (Item 2)

Councillor Cartwright (Hampshire) was appointed as the Chairman for 2007/08 and in his new role wished to propose a vote of thanks to Councillor Barnard for his leadership over the last 12 months.

Councillor Cartwright then took the Chair.

APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN 2007/08

Councillor Murphy (East Sussex) proposed that the role of Vice Chairman for 2007/08 go to Councillor Rowlands (Buckinghamshire) and this was seconded by Councillor Cope (Kent).

APPOINTMENT OF CLERK 2006/07

Clerking services would be provided by East Sussex, although CFO Bonney would provide officer support to the Chairman.

14/07 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 3)

Councillor Mrs Stevens (Surrey), CFO Burrell (West Sussex) and CFO Hendry (Kent).

15/07 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 4)

There were none.

16/07 PROCEDURAL MATTERS (Item 5)

There were no questions from Members.

17/07 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING (Item 6)

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the RMB meeting held on 17 January 2007 be approved and signed by the Chairman.

18/07 REVIEW OF RMB CONSTITUTION (Item 7)

At their meeting on 12th July 2006, Members of the Regional Management Board (RMB) resolved that a report on the RMB constitution be noted but that no action be taken at the time to amend the constitution of the Board. However, a further report reviewing it should be considered at the Annual General Meeting of the RMB.

The resolution came as a result of requests from both Hampshire and Kent & Medway Fire Authorities to consider increasing the size of the Board from nine to fifteen, with the additional positions reflecting proportionality. CFO Bonney (Hampshire) presented a report prepared by CFO Burrell (West Sussex) that gave members of the Board alternative constitutional models for their consideration. It was also noted that any change to the constitution would require ratification by each individual Fire Authority.

Councillor Rowlands (Buckinghamshire) stated that this matter had now been debated three times, and he was still of the opinion that the current constitution worked well, and all his Fire Authority Members were more than happy with it. He also pointed out that, in the three years he had been a member of the Board, this was the only item that had ever required a vote

Councillor Murphy (East Sussex) stated that Members of his Fire Authority, which was effectively 'hung', also had no appetite for change to the constitution. Some had attended RMB meetings and they were happy with the way he reported back to them.

Councillor Cope (Kent) came from a mixed Authority whose members felt strongly that some form of minority group representation on the Board was desirable and would be a helpful asset.

Councillor Cartwright (Hampshire) had requested the previous reports at the request of his Authority, where the Conservative Group currently held a small majority. Information in the report showed the SE RMB as the only RMB having just one member per authority and he proposed some form of balancing of the Board's membership.

Councillor Abraham (Isle of Wight) supported the current arrangements and felt that having a mix of Combined Fire Authorities and County Fire Authorities would make any change very difficult; he had taken over from a Liberal Democrat and there had not been any problems then.

Councillor Bryant (Royal Berkshire) felt that the current system worked well and would be difficult to improve.

Councillor Barnard (West Sussex) also felt that the current arrangements worked well, and that the mix of CFAs and County FAs would make any change very difficult.

Councillor Cartwright proposed that the constitution of the Board be changed to a membership of 15, with representation outside of the current Chairs to be decided. The motion was seconded by Councillor Cope and **LOST** 2:7.

Councillor Rowlands proposed the status quo of one authority/one member/one vote. The motion was seconded by Councillor Murphy and **CARRIED** 7:2.

RESOLVED – That the membership of the SE Regional Management Board remain at nine members – one from each of the constituent Fire Authorities.

19/07 THE SOUTH EAST HR PARTNERSHIP (Item 8)

CFO Bonney (Hampshire) presented a report that sought the RMB's approval for a Regional Human Resources Strategy for the South East. This Strategy was necessary to focus regional human resource management efforts on the key HR issues in the South East where concerted action would 'add value' for each Fire and Rescue Service by enhancing capacity, avoiding duplication and addressing common challenges together. It also met the Government's request set out in paragraph 5.13 of the Fire and Rescue National Framework, that Fire and Rescue Authorities, through RMBs, draw up a regional HR Strategy encompassing the full range of HR activities whilst ensuring the regional HR strategy is compatible with each Fire and Rescue Service's Integrated Risk Management Plan (IRMP).

Councillor Rowlands (Buckinghamshire) asked why the Strategy was due to be reviewed in Autumn 2008 and CFO Bonney explained that a lot of projects were due to end then, and regional strategies were due for review.

Councillor Murphy (East Sussex) asked about consultation with representative bodies and was informed that they had all been consulted regionally, but it appeared that none had responded.

The Chairman thanked CFO Bonney for his work on the Strategy.

RESOLVED – That the draft South East Regional Human Resources Strategy be adopted subject to review in the autumn of 2008.

20/07 RMB BUSINESS PLAN 2007/10 (Item 9)

ACO Kerr (Kent) presented a report that informed Members of a regional business plan which had been developed, setting out the RMB's aspirations for the next three years, and those projects which are to be reported on a regular basis to the RMB. The opportunity had also been taken to develop some simplified priorities for the region, which would develop those agreed as part of the previous years' plan. It was anticipated that the Plan would go to print at the end of the month, subject to final approval by the Chairman of the Improvement work stream.

Councillor Rowlands (Buckinghamshire) requested that mention be made of the continued absence of the full business case and ACO Kerr agreed to strengthen the wording in the Chairman's introduction.

Councillor Bryant (Royal Berkshire) sought clarification of who the documents had been circulated to and was informed that the Business Plan had gone to CFAs, CFOs, the Audit Commission, GOSE, the LGA and CLG. The newsletter had gone to a wider audience and CFOs could distribute it to staff as they thought appropriate.

Councillor Barnard (West Sussex) confirmed that members of the LACC are Fire Authorities, and not named individuals.

CFO Prichard (East Sussex) requested clarification on how the RMB should be promoting itself - was this still low key, or should it be more proactive, as was SEFIP? Members agreed that there were massive benefits in advertising the successes of SEFIP but, unless similar (financial) benefits would arise from publicising the work of the RMB, this should remain low key.

RESOLVED – That

- 1) the regional business plan be approved for final publication subject to minor alterations to text agreed with the Chairman of the Improvement work stream; and
- 2) the SEFIP newsletter be noted.

21/07 PROGRESS AGAINST PLAN (Item 10)

ACO Kerr (Kent) presented a report that set out the progress made for the period January to March 2007 against the each of the work streams in the regional business plan. It was noted that, in general, good progress was being made.

Councillor Murphy (East Sussex) raised a concern about the national uniform chosen by FireBuy. Limited consultation appeared to have been undertaken and he was disappointed that the chosen colour was grey – dark blue had proved very popular in East Sussex.

CFO Cox (Royal Berkshire) had seen the uniform and explained the concept of having nationally branded corporate wear (including the LGA fire logo). CFO Parry (Oxfordshire) agreed to get feedback from his deputy, Mike Smythe, who was on the working group.

Councillor Rowlands (Buckinghamshire) had recently received a presentation by FireBuy where he was assured that there would be a variety of uniform to choose from, and that existing contracts could be honoured until their expiry dates. DCFO Hedger confirmed that there would be a national brand, with a choice of colours.

Councillor Abraham (Isle of Wight) agreed that there should have been more consultation with users, wearers and buyers and CFO Bonney (Hampshire) explained that FireBuy had undertaken a lot of work testing PPE but this may have not been communicated particularly well to members. He reminded members that Fire Authorities would be facing enormous financial pressures by the end of the year and FireBuy should be given the opportunity to prove itself. CFO Cox also thought that FireBuy would be consulting users and would be pushing the brand, with opportunities to mix and match. CFO Parry explained that FireBuy must demonstrate Best Value and that, if Authorities chose to buy elsewhere, they would also have to prove Best Value.

RESOLVED – That

- 1) the progress made be noted; and
- 2) the recent newsletter issued by the South East Fire Improvement Partnership be noted.

22/07 CORRESPONDENCE (Item 11)

The Chairman had received a reply from Angela Smith regarding fire resilience programmes, following a request by Members at the meeting of the RMB in October 2006. Since then, a communication had been received from DCLG giving an update on when the RCC was expected to 'go live' and Members agreed a press release to be issued detailing the cut over dates - the first FRS would be Hampshire in May 2010 and the Isle of Wight and Surrey would be last, in September 2011.

CFO Prichard (East Sussex) pointed out the difficulties that could arise with maintaining existing systems because of these extended cut over dates and the prohibitive costs that would undoubtedly be incurred. It was agreed that CFOs needed to make this point forcibly to the Government, who were not planning to provide funding to cover this.

The CLG communication also hinted at the imminent release of details of the business case, and members considered whether they needed to meet again before the next scheduled meeting in July. It was agreed to wait for CFO Burrell (West Sussex) to produce a précis and seek his advice on whether an additional meeting of the RMB/Chiefs and Chairs needed to be called and the best timing for this, bearing in mind the elections in May and possible changes to the Board's membership.

The Chairman had also received a letter from Watch Manager Chris Taylor asking the Board to endorse a NWFS Award and asking CFOs to sanction the wearing of the Award on uniform/corporate wear in accordance with local dress codes.

CFO Prichard reported that CFOA had received a similar letter and had responded supporting the Award, but not mentioning the wearing of the Badge, as they felt it could open up requests from other bodies for their badges to be worn.

Members agreed that CFO Bonney (Hampshire) should draft a reply for the Chairman in a similar vein on behalf of the RMB.

Councillor Rowlands (Buckinghamshire) reported that his Authority had been chosen as one of three 'pilots' for the new CPA process – the assessment was due to commence in two weeks with a re-grading due in September. He therefore proposed sharing this information with RMB colleagues via a presentation to the Board in October.

23/07 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS (Item 12)

11 July 2007, commencing at 11.00 hours, at Surrey Fire & Rescue HQ, Reigate.

24/07 EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

There were no items for which the press and public were excluded.

The meeting closed at 12.12 hours.

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Chairman