

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

PROGRESS AGAINST PLAN 10 OCTOBER 2007

KEY ISSUE/DECISION

The Regional Management Board is asked to note the progress made against the current regional business plan, and a recent South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP) newsletter on Equality and Diversity.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report sets out the progress made for the period July-September 2007 against the each of the work areas in the regional business plan. In general good progress is being made. Real savings are beginning to be generated by the Procurement work area, through the regional procurement manager bringing deals available on the marketplace to the attention of FRAs. For example, those authorities wishing to implement procurement cards can now take advantage of a deal through Lloyds TSB which gives access to their scheme for a cost of £1, compared to the previous offer of £5k per FRA.

The key issue in the Human Resources and Training work areas is progressing the peer reviews for meeting level 3 of the equality standard for local government by December 2008. A detailed progress report will be presented by the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) at the meeting.

The other key issue for Members to consider is the issues surrounding the Regional Control Centre. Much more detail will be available in the separate report to be presented by West Sussex elsewhere on this agenda. However, it is felt to be of sufficient importance that it needs to be raised in the progress report as well.

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 SEFIP newsletter on equality and diversity (**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: None

INTRODUCTION

This is the second report on progress against the business plan for 2007/10. Following comments made at the last meeting of the Board, an expanded executive summary has been added to give Members a broader overview of progress in regional issues. Additionally commentary against each of the RMB's priorities is given.

ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

Progress against Priorities

In the regional business plan approved by Members in April 2007, the opportunity was taken to set out a limited number of priorities. These are restated below, and comments against each are given:

- Priority 1 - to maintain the individual accountability of constituent Fire and Rescue Authorities, and their ability to meet local risks through Integrated Risk Management Plans

The desire to maintain the individual accountability of constituent FRAs is a consistent theme in the Regional Business Plan. No action taken by any work area has had any impact on this priority during the period July–September 2007.

- Priority 2 - to continue to support the management of the transition from local to regional control centres (RCC) and transfer arrangements for control staff as far as is reasonably practicable

Regional Control Centre and Firelink remain a key risk for the RMB. Further detail on the latest position in relation to the RCC is contained in the relevant section of this report, as well as elsewhere on this agenda.

- Priority 3 - to raise the profile of the Regional Management Board to ensure that it is positioned to access funding available at a regional and sub-regional level

A bid for further funding from the Capacity Building Fund (CBF) is included elsewhere on this agenda. Work on a communications strategy will commence shortly and will be brought to the Board for approval.

- Priority 4 - To harness the work of the procurement work stream to drive efficiency across the region in procurement and shared services

Momentum has been maintained and FRAs are taking advantage of offers available on the marketplace to at the minimum benchmark existing service provision, or change suppliers.

- Priority 5 - To improve the region's performance against the equality standard for local government by Dec 2008.

An update on progress against this issue is included elsewhere on this agenda.

Review of work areas

All work areas of the Board have progressed well so far this year, as set out in the paragraphs below.

- **Community Safety – Surrey Fire and Rescue Service**

The South East Fire and Rescue Services' Business Plan 2007/10 included a project on promoting the installation of sprinklers wherever they may help to save lives and reduce injuries. A paper is elsewhere on this agenda which gives Members of the Board information on recent work undertaken to understand barriers to the uptake of sprinkler systems, and a related media campaign designed to overcome negative perceptions. The report also contains an update on work conducted by HFRS on this issue. The work to promote sprinklers by FRAs in the region will continue and is likely to feature in the business plan for 2008/11.

The prevention group continues to liaise with the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) to ensure key prevention activity is co-ordinated. CLG is assisting with the development of contacts with Department for Transport who have the primary responsibility for traffic and road safety.

- **Human Resources – Hampshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

There continues to be good progress in this area of activity. Helping FRAs meet level three of the equality standard for local government is a key priority for the RMB. The consultant is currently undertaking desk-top reviews in Kent, Hampshire and West Sussex Authorities prior to testing the reviews with on-site visits. The timetable for the remaining audits is being finalised. Further information on the progress of this project is available elsewhere on this agenda.

Another project which is being progressed is on a regional portal for receiving applications for positions within FRAs. A questionnaire to identify user requirements has been issued. A portal demonstration and workshop has been arranged to produce a specification prior to selecting suitable suppliers.

A SEFIP newsletter on equality and diversity issues was recently issued. It is attached at **appendix 1** for Members' information.

- **Training - Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

FRAs continue to take forward the outcomes of the regional training review completed last year. The Employee Development Group has met twice since April 07. The Group has new terms of reference, focused on delivering the requirements of the RMB Plan 2007/10, and is now made up of representatives from all 9 SE FRAs.

The work of the group is divided into the 4 work areas identified within the RMB Plan and each lead has prepared a timeline for their respective work stream.

Assessment and Development Centre activity is high at Supervisory and Middle Manager levels with most FRAs having planned the next programme. All FRAs have committed to the regional process for the strategic level ADC with advertisement through September for a November delivery date.

- **Improvement – Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority**

The website www.sefip.gov.uk, went live on 14 June 2007, and has been developed in partnership with East Sussex Fire & Rescue Service. It is intended to make the process of sharing information easier, both within and outside of the partnership. The website contains details of how fire and rescue services are working together on a number of key issues across the south east. Links to other improvement and efficiency partnerships are also available. The project plan is being updated to reflect phase two of the roll-out of the website, which will allow more interactive features to be developed.

As well as having membership of the Inter-Authorities Group, (IAG), all FRAs in the SE now have access to the Local Authorities Research & Intelligence Association (LARIA). LARIA

was established in 1974 to promote the role and practice of research within the field of local government and provide a supportive network for those conducting or commissioning research. It is a support network for practitioners of social research (consultation) and statistical data collection and analysis. Whilst the membership is corporate, the association operates through named contacts for supplying information and publications.

The RMB Members' Event was held at Leeds Castle on 11/12 September 2007. The intention of the session was to meet together in an informal setting, giving Members an understanding of themselves and their colleagues and how this understanding can help deliver the aims and objectives of the board. The outcomes will be reflected in the development of the business plan for 2008/11.

Using the South East Centre of Excellence (SECE) portal, SEFIP issued a tender for peer review team leaders. From the expressions of interest received, 4 organisations have been selected to provide peer review services. Details of those selected, and some background information about the companies can be found in SEFIP newsletter 8. So far one review has been commissioned and SEFIP is working on the detail with this authority. SEFIP has also been notified of the potential for one further review. A further review can be supported with funding available of £10k on a first come, first served basis.

- **Media and Communications – East Sussex Fire & Rescue Authority**

A communications strategy covering the lifespan of the next RMB business plan will be brought to the next meeting of the Board in January 2007.

Briefing notes are issued on an ad hoc basis as issues arise. So far 11 have been produced and are circulated to all CFOs as a key way of sharing learning. They are also made available on the SEFIP website.

Media handling training is being procured for key officers. Members of the Board may also wish to take advantage of this product.

In a recent CLG media analysis report for the Fire Kills campaign between April 2006 and June 2007, the South East was the strongest region in terms of number of articles with 105 achieved. The next best region achieved 53. David Warby of Surrey, and Stuart Skilton and John Pereira of Kent were named as some of the most prolific speakers in the country.

- **Procurement – Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

The regional procurement manager has initiated a skills audit of procurement staff. So far five FRAs have replied, and arising from an initial analysis, it has become clear that training on EU Procurement regulations would be useful to procurement officers in FRAs and this has been commissioned using CBF.

Following further CBF being devolved into the region, a number of courses on project sponsorship and management are available free of charge. FRAs will be contacted in due course about nominating officers to attend these sessions. Through the Peer Review Brokering Service, a day's training course for business case development will also be supported by CBF for procurement work area members.

Expenditure analysis using data from 6 FRAs has been completed, which highlighted major areas of spend as vehicle procurement, maintenance and facilities management. This information will begin to inform a commodities strategy which will be brought to Members in due course. This will look to use CBF to buy in capacity to conduct benchmarking exercise through the peer review brokering service to drive down unit costs and improve outcomes for FRAs.

A procurement strategy and rolling 3-year procurement plan has been produced and is elsewhere on this agenda. This sets out clear goals sought from regional procurement which can be measured and reported on a regular basis to CFOs.

All FRAs now have access to the Bluelight portal, as well as the Local Authority contract store run by the South East Centre of Excellence (SECE). This allows FRAs access to all police and fire contracts available through the Bluelight portal and local authority contracts in the South East. Continued access has been provided through capacity building funding to April 2008. Further support may be available through this route if it is shown to be of benefit to FRAs

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

South East Fire & Rescue Control Centre Ltd is now registered at Companies House. Final details of the Members' Agreement and cost apportionment have still to be confirmed with FRAs' legal and financial representatives prior to approval by the RMB. A programme for induction of Board members and programme of early decisions is elsewhere on this agenda.

The Fareham building is on schedule for practical completion on 14 May 2008.

The Department for Communities and Local Government signed a contract in April with EADS to provide infrastructure services. EADS is now engaging with the national project team to develop the detailed design for the systems. Provision of the data schema has been put back until the New Year.

The national project team has been in discussion with EADS about convergence, which continues to be a problematic area. The provision of more information to FRAs for implementation has been put back until the New Year.

In relation to Firelink, Airwave has changed key managers and is also assigning additional staff to the project.

- **Resilience – Buckinghamshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

Phase 1 of the project to improve the use of specialist resources on a regional basis is progressing but is behind schedule. It has been delayed due to resource commitment to recent flooding events. Information is currently being collated on the disposition of specialist resources within the region. Statistics relating to specialist officers from south east FRAs are being gathered prior to determining the most appropriate functional roles for regional sharing agreements. A report will be issued to the Resilience group in December.

Work has continued on developing a regional approach to business continuity planning (BCP). Progress to date has seen the production of a project plan with timescales set for the deliverables. A draft activity plan has also been drawn up which sets out the key activities in more detail and identifies the lead officers and the timetable for the delivery.

A draft SE Regional BCP Policy has also been developed which will be presented to the Contingency Planning Group for discussion. Following agreement, a period of consultation will take place within each FRA with the final policy planned to be presented to CFOs in January 2008 prior to final endorsement by the RMB.

CLG has recently issued a good practice guide arising out of the OASD process, which is available at

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/frscircularoperationalassessment>

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 SEFIP newsletter on equality and diversity (**appendix 1** refers).