



Introduction

The South East Fire and Rescue Services' Regional Management Board (RMB) comprises all Chairmen of Fire and Rescue Authorities in the South East and is responsible for delivering key collaborative projects in work areas such as training, procurement, and human resource management. A further work area is Improvement, for which Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Authority (KMFRA) is responsible.

Following initial work by Hampshire and the Isle of Wight FRAs, KMFRA led a bid for external funding to support a programme of improvement activities across all 9 fire and rescue authorities in the South East. To access the funding, a partnership was formed, known as the South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP). SEFIP successfully attracted £450k of Capacity Building Funding for the period 2006/08.

Since this funding was obtained, much activity has been progressed which leave a legacy of improved capacity in FRAs across the region. Innovative packages of training and development for Members have been run, officers have received training in key skills which were previously lacking in FRAs, and a central website www.sefip.gov.uk for sharing good practice has been developed.

However our journey does not stop there. Building capacity is still critical to help FRAs meet the broader role now expected of them. Using key drivers such as the Local Government White Paper, National Improvement Strategy, Comprehensive Spending Review 2007, the UK Climate Change Strategy and the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Services, we have identified key areas where we need support to leave lasting capacity and embed change and new ways of working. We have split these areas into three areas: firstly allowing FRAs to meet the national framework for fire and rescue authorities, secondly, working together and finally building capacity.

Objectives

We have identified the following projects for which we would like to seek capacity building support:

Section 1: Meeting the needs of the National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities (£320k)

- Support for the delivery of the regional procurement strategy – continued funding for the work programme of the regional procurement manager;
- Reaching at least level 4 of the equality standard for local government across the region – support for further actions to meet at least level 4 of the standard by December 2012;
- Improving the region's performance in relation to environmental issues – either an investigation of current practice, or a programme of funded peer reviews provided by the IDeA, including potential increased use of video conferencing for meetings;
- Improving risk management across FRAs - a baseline assessment of current practice to establish a common minimum corporate risk management standard across the region.

Section 2: Working together (£340k)

- Evaluation of the potential for shared services – shared services will increasingly be an issue for fire and rescue services, and the bid needs to reflect this issue;
- Delivery of common safety campaigns to take advantage of economies of scale and testing effectiveness of existing measures– in areas such as common sprinkler campaigns, following the closure of the National Community Fire Safety Centre;
- Partnership development to allow FRAs to lead beyond authority – influencing and persuading skills for FRAs when engaging in new partnerships or negotiating revised partnerships;
- Further extension of ability to share information and learning across the region - further development to the SEFIP website;
- Work with other Improvement Partnerships on Joint Projects;
- Support of regional projects to ensure service delivery points are fit for the future – a marker on a proposed approach to asset management being led by Buckinghamshire FRA.

Section 3: Building capacity (£300k)

- Ensuring Members achieve their political priorities for FRAs – additional Member opportunities following the Leeds Castle event;
- Developing Future Leaders: sponsorship of places on the national future leaders' scheme and 'political' skills training for middle managers;
- Extension of the Peer Review Brokering Service – further peer review support, including development/adaptations of review mechanisms for FRAs covering improvements arising from inspection, including value for money assessments where collaborative action will be of benefit, either in the provision of training or additional external support;
- Facilitation and shared learning – further support for training and conferences, and provision of a secondment scheme for fire and rescue authorities, between and out of FRAs into other local government organisations and businesses.

Taken in their totality, these represent an ambitious programme of projects, which will stretch SEFIP. But they are also projects which will help to take the region forward. It may be that some projects are common to other regional improvement and efficiency partnerships. We are more than happy to collaborate with colleagues in these partnerships to deliver these projects.

Governance Arrangements

SEFIP is the delivery agent for the Improvement work area of the RMB. The responsible Elected Member is Councillor Bryan Cope (KMFRA). The RMB receives progress updates from all work areas on a quarterly basis. In addition, the work of SEFIP is directed by the SEFIP stakeholder group, which comprises the Chief Fire Officers of Kent, Hampshire and Isle of Wight FRAs. Formal rules of engagement have been approved by this group for how Capacity Building allocations made to the partnership should be used.

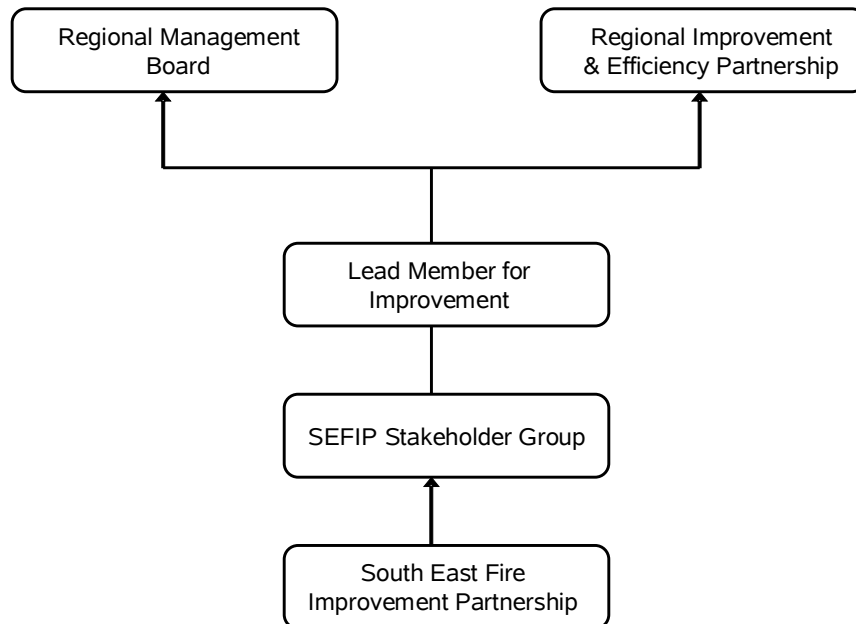
SEFIP is represented at the Regional Improvement and Efficiency Board by Cllr Cope. Progress made by the partnership is also reported to this Board. Our governance structure is described in figure 1 below.

SEFIP lead officers.

The key contacts in SEFIP are:

Role	Name	Telephone	Email
SEFIP Lead Officer	Charles Kerr - Director Finance and Corporate Services	01622 698215	charles.kerr@kent.fire-uk.org
SEFIP Programme Manager	James Finch	01622 698453	James.finch@kent.fire-uk.org
SEFIP Improvement Officer	Phil Dickens	01622 698459	Phil.dickens@kent.fire-uk.org

Figure 1: SEFIP Governance Structure



Successes To Date

Overall excellent progress is being made by SEFIP, and it appears to having a high impact both with FRAs in the region, and in its dealings with central and regional government bodies. The role of SEFIP is to facilitate collaboration, and to seek good practice and share with Fire and Rescue Authorities in the South East. This is achieved in various ways:

- Website: the SEFIP website www.sefip.gov.uk launched on 4 June 2007, and is a key tool for sharing best practice and raising the profile of fire and rescue issues with colleagues in the Government Office and the regional efficiency partnership. Each work area has its own dedicated page. A membership area, protected by password, is being developed in time for the first upgrade to the site towards the end of 2007.
- SEFIP newsletters: 9 SEFIP newsletters have been issued. All newsletters are available on the website in the resource archive. These are circulated to colleagues in

other improvement and efficacy partnerships, as well as GOSE, CLG and the Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor's Unit.

- Briefing Notes: briefing notes are issued on an ad hoc basis. These are generally the outcomes of conferences, but the opportunity is also taken to alert colleagues to recently issued guidance or information from government or the Audit Commission. Briefing notes are available in the resources archive of the website.
- Sponsorship of attendance at training events and conferences: Capacity Building Funding (CBF) has been used to allow officers and Members to attend national and regional conferences. Additionally, a number of officers will attend sessions provided by ModernGov on issues such as national policy development, and the role of the European Union during autumn 2007.
- Member Development: the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) has hosted an event at Leeds Castle on 11/12 September for all RMB Members, specifically on team building.
- Seeking access to forums: the RMB is seeking associate membership of the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA). SEFIP has also negotiated a discounted rate for membership of the Inter-Authorities Group (IAG). We have also joined LARIA (the Local Authorities Research & Intelligence Association).
- Use of National Devolved Funding: A programme for the use of nationally supported schemes within the region was presented to the South East Region Efficiency and Improvement Board on 31 October 2007. The fire element of the bid centres on Member development with specific provision to enable the Leeds Castle event to be built upon and other opportunities for FRA Members to access training through their own councils. The skills shortage strand includes places for project sponsorship and management development.
- Peer Review Brokering Service: The Peer Review Brokering Service provides easy access to accredited peer reviewers to critically assess an authority's approach to a topic. Working with peers helps an authority to assess itself objectively and pinpoint its strengths and weaknesses, without creating the interrogative environment of an external inspection.
- Supporting Regional Procurement: we have worked with the regional procurement manager to improve skills across the region, and helped to deliver significant efficiency savings for FRAs.