

Report No: RMB/32/07
Meeting Date: 16 January 2008
Agenda Item No: 11

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

**NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITIES – A REGIONAL
PERSPECTIVE
16 JANUARY 2008**

KEY ISSUE/DECISION

The Regional Management Board (RMB) is asked to approve a response to the consultation on the new National Framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) is consulting on a draft National Framework covering the period from 2008/11 with a closing date of 6 February 2008. The draft is a significant departure from previous versions in that it seeks to be a shorter, more concise and more strategic document, with fewer 'musts' and 'shoulds.' The Framework is structured into four distinct chapters dealing with Prevention, Protection & Response, Resilience, Workforce & Diversity, and Governance & Improvement.

The draft response for Members' consideration is attached at **Appendix 2** to this report.

CONSULTATION

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:

- i. Agree the response to the consultation on the draft National Framework 2008/11 (**Appendix 2** refers)

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

The National Framework places increased expectations on RMBs, and Members will wish to ensure that these expectations are reasonable and deliverable within the current legislative framework for Fire and Rescue Authorities.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

INTRODUCTION

The Government is responsible for setting clear priorities and objectives for the Fire and Rescue Service and is required by the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to set these out in a National Framework document, upon which it must consult. The Government has recently issued a draft for consultation which covers the period from 2008/11 and a response is sought by February 6 2008.

The draft new Framework takes a different approach from previous versions in that it seeks to be a more concise and strategic document, structured into four rather than nine chapters and reducing the number of 'musts' and 'shoulds' for fire and rescue authorities. It articulates the Government's expectations for the service as well as setting out what the Department will do in supporting the continuing development of the modernisation agenda. The draft framework covers four main chapter headings; Prevention, Protection & Response, Resilience, Workforce & Diversity, and Governance & Improvement.

In general the draft Framework can be considered an improvement on previous versions as it attempts to focus more on strategic outcomes rather than prescribing actions and inputs. It also covers a three year time span which is more helpful as this matches the RMB's business planning horizons. However, there are some specific issues within the Framework which Members may wish to take a view on, as it signals an implied change in Government policy in relation to RMBs.

It is likely that individual FRAs would have each considered and submitted their own responses to this document. Therefore, this report and consultation response focus only on the regional implications of the Framework. The covering letter and draft response are attached at **Appendices 1 & 2** for Members' consideration.

ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY

Although undoubtedly an improvement on previous prescriptive iterations, the draft Framework appears to represent a shift in policy by the CLG towards RMBs. For example a link is made between the role of the RMB and duties arising out of the Civil Contingencies Act (CCA) 2005. The Framework seeks to class the unavailability of fire and rescue service staff as an emergency in the context of the CCA, which is debatable. Additionally, the draft appears to blur the boundaries of responsibilities set out in the CCA in relation to Regional Resilience Frameworks (RRFs). RMBs have no statutory power under the Fire Service Act 2004 in relation to RRFs, and to meet this requirement would probably require a change to primary legislation. This is not acknowledged in the Framework.

The Framework contains an implied role for RMBs in setting the overall policy direction for FRAs through their Integrated Risk Management Plans (IRMPs). Although each FRA will wish to be aware of neighbouring authorities intentions in relation to service development, Members have been consistent in their view that IRMPs remain a statement of a FRA's response to meeting local risks. The consultation response reflects this view.

There is no statutory duty on RMB to take account of either IRMPs or the CCA in the delivery of its business plans, and if this is the intention of Government, the framework should explicitly state this.

There is a drive in the document to ensuring that RMBs review current activity, with a view to identifying efficiencies, perhaps through shared service arrangements in some areas of work. The Framework also asks RMBs to review their successes to date, and to look for further opportunities to work together. This will be driven through the delivery of a revised business plan due to be brought to the RMB in April 2008, rather than as a separate project.

The National Framework restates the Government's commitment to the Regional Control Centre (RCC) project. Members of the Board have made their concerns in relation to the project clear. One key area of risk for FRAs is the likelihood of further slippage in the project, and the potential impact on some FRAs in the region whose existing mobilisation systems

will be near the end of their useable life before cutover to the RCC. This is further complicated by suppliers of systems no longer trading, making development work difficult. This may mean that interim arrangements will need to be put in place, which will have a funding implication on those FRAs affected. The opportunity has been taken in the consultation response to remind the government that any further slippage will worsen this impact.

IMPLICATIONS

The Government's intentions towards RMBs are not clearly set out in the draft Framework, and it is hoped that this will be clarified in the final version. Some significant policy changes are implied, and the Government needs to make clear its view.

CONCLUSION

Members are asked to

- i. Agree the response to the consultation on the draft National Framework 2008/11
(**Appendix 2** refers)