

**CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES
13 DECEMBER 2010**

**THE FUTURE OF THE SOUTH EAST FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES'
REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARD**

Report by Chief Fire Officer

Introduction

1. At the launch of the Fire Futures' strategic review of Fire and Rescue Services on 28 July 2010, the Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP, announced that he will allow more freedom for individual Fire Authorities to work on a collaborative basis in a way that best suits local needs and not determined by previous regional boundaries.
2. The South East Fire and Rescue Services' Regional Management Board (SE RMB) was established under primary legislation and under the terms of the RMB's constitution, there is no provision for the RMB to abolish itself. There is, therefore, a decision to be made by each Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) within the region on whether they will continue to collaborate and if so, how this will be achieved to maximise the benefits offered.
3. It is accepted that the SE RMB has worked well in recent years and has provided a number of significant projects and efficiency savings.

Background

4. The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 required the relevant Minister to create a National Framework document that would provide Fire Authorities with the government's expectations and priorities. The National Framework 2008-11 confirmed the requirement for Fire Authorities to work collaboratively on a regional basis via the use of Regional Management Boards (RMBs).
5. The South East Fire and Rescue Services' Regional Management Board was established in 2004 by the nine Fire and Rescue Services in the South-East: Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Kent, Oxfordshire, Royal Berkshire, Surrey and West Sussex.
6. Its membership comprises the Chairman or Portfolio Holder of each Service. The Chairman of the Board is appointed annually and is currently Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities.
7. Board meetings are held every three months. Elected Members of the RMB are asked to act as the 'scrutiny' panel and to assure themselves that the outcomes they agree in their plan are being delivered. Chief Fire Officers also perform a scrutiny function, whilst also approving business cases for projects in the plan.

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8. The South East was the first Regional Management Board in England to create a “fire only” improvement partnership and it is a model that has been picked up by the Fire and Rescue sector as a model of good practice.
9. Fire and Rescue Services in the South East have formed an improvement partnership – the South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP). SEFIP is a member of the regional improvement and efficiency partnership – known as IESE, or Improvement and Efficiency South East. This group is able to approve funding for projects which SEFIP want to run. SEFIP is also the programme management function for the Regional Management Board. It reports to the SEFIP Stakeholder Group which is currently the Chief Officers of Kent, Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and Buckinghamshire. This group will approve the project plans once business cases have been approved.
10. SEFIP is a small team but it draws in significant support from Fire and Rescue Services to deliver projects on behalf of the Board. They also have an extensive resources section on the SEFIP website which includes briefing notes, newsletters, case studies of good practice and all papers from RMB meetings.
11. This approach has been proactive through joint initiatives, particularly around procurement, standardisation of operational procedures and equality and diversity.
12. To date, the SE RMB has achieved a number of notable successes including the following:
 - SEFIP website created and currently hosted by Kent FRS;
 - Created three year business plans with agreed expectations;
 - With regard to procurement, the nine Services within the South East already collaborate in terms of the selection and purchasing of work wear and are currently reaching the finishing stages of contracts covering respiratory equipment and fire kit;
 - The work wear contract is available to all English Fire and Rescue Services and has proved so beneficial that some 26 Fire Authorities now procure through this contract, which has delivered efficiencies and economies of scale and has avoided the need for 25 other fire authorities to endure the tendering process;
 - In 2008/09 SEFIP/RMB generated £534k of efficiency savings which led to a letter of congratulations from the government. In 2009/10 another £2.4m was generated;
 - Seven of the nine FRSs (including Oxfordshire) have achieved Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. In 2006, when the support started, no FRS was achieving this;
 - Working on a collaborative approach to fire investigation;
 - Developed shared community safety campaigns e.g. www.standbyourpan.com. This has been supported by a common approach to community risk intelligence using the data we all hold to improve what we know about the public we serve. The first regional customer insight survey [April-June 2009] has helped to guide community

safety interventions to the public using the most effective ways to get safety messages to people based on their lifestyle. The survey suggested that 25% of people have changed their behaviour as a result of what SEFIP members have said to them.

13. There is no direct financial implication to OFRS other than attendance costs at the meetings, which could be held anywhere in the South East Region (video conferencing is used whenever possible to minimise travel and cost). Administrative and other related costs were funded by the South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP), which Oxfordshire contributed to. This arrangement would continue if the recommendation is accepted.

Financial and Staff Implications

14. There are no staff implications relating to this paper.
15. There is no direct financial implication to OFRS other than attendance costs at the meetings, which could be held anywhere in the South East Region (video conferencing is used whenever possible to minimise travel and cost). Administrative and other related costs were funded by the South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP), which Oxfordshire contributed to. This arrangement would continue if the recommendation is accepted.

Background to the Recommendation

16. It is recommended that the Regional Management Board be wound-up at such time that the primary legislation is amended after each FRA has sought and achieved agreement in principle to this move locally. This could be progressed across the region in the coming months whilst accepting that any amendment to the legislation is unlikely to take place before Christmas 2010.
17. At a SE RMB meeting on 6 October 2010, it was agreed that the recommended approach would be to use the South East Fire Improvement Partnership to replace the SE RMB. The remit of the SEFIP would be broadly similar to the SE RMB but would no longer be constrained by the requirement to work regionally.
18. SEFIP has a website and an effective infrastructure in place that will enable it to continue the excellent work done in the past by the SE RMB. It also has in place contacts with similar schemes elsewhere in the country that can be used effectively to share good practice and potentially share efficiencies.

RECOMMENDATION

19. **The Cabinet Member Safer & Stronger Communities is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - (a) **agree to support the closure of the South East Regional Management Board at the appropriate time; and**

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- (b) agree to support the use of a South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP) format in its place.**

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Background papers: Nil

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