

**CABINET MEMBER FOR SAFER & STRONGER COMMUNITIES  
11 APRIL 2011**

**FORMAL COLLABORATION PROGRAMME BETWEEN  
OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL FIRE AUTHORITY, ROYAL  
BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE & MILTON  
KEYNES FIRE AUTHORITY**

**Report by Chief Fire Officer – Fire & Rescue Service**

**Introduction**

1. On July 2010 the Fire Minister Bob Neill announced the termination of forced regionalisation of fire services in the UK with the intention to give greater powers and responsibilities to communities.
2. The Minister also announced that whilst the 2008/11 Fire & Rescue Services National Framework remained in force, without fettering his discretion, he will no longer expect to enforce Regional Management Boards\* and he would allow freedom for individual authorities to work on a collaborative basis in a way that works best locally and is not determined by regional boundaries.
3. In December 2010 the three Thames Valley Chief Fire Officers met & agreed that they wished to see more formal joint working and collaborative arrangements between the three Thames Valley Services. They decided to concentrate on three projects that can be agreed and delivered in reasonable time frames. The projects were subjected to scoping studies each led by a different Fire Authority. The projects are as follows:
  - (a) Project 1 - Sharing of high level operationally related Health & Safety policy and strategy provision. Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority to lead.
  - (b) Project 2 - To assess whether there can be a similar common policy development process for Fire Safety Enforcement to include inspection protocols, enforcement procedures and fire engineering advice. Oxfordshire Fire Authority to lead.
  - (c) Project 3 - A study of operational officer cover arrangements, including issues such as the provision of Fire Investigation, Accident Investigation, Fire Safety Enforcement, Post Fire Inspection and New Dimension (Resilience) cover. Consideration is also to be given to a common incident command system, common training and assessment and the interoperability of rota systems. This review is to cover roles from Station Manager to Brigade Manager. Royal Berkshire Fire Authority to lead.

4. On 18 January 2011 the initial scoping studies were presented to the three Thames Valley Chief Fire Officers and it was agreed that subject to political agreement in all three authorities further work should be undertaken to progress the projects.

\* Regional Management Boards (RMB) were established in 2003 and were made up of Fire and Rescue Authorities grouped together by their relevant Government Office region. At a South East RMB meeting on 6th October 2010, it was agreed that the recommended approach would be to use the South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP) to replace the South East RMB. The remit of SEFIP would be broadly similar to South East RMB but would no longer be constrained by the requirement to work regionally.

## **Background**

5. The Fire & Rescue Services Act, 2004 required the relevant Minister to create a National Framework document that would provide Fire Authorities with the expectations and priorities of the Government. 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).
6. At the launch of the 'Fire Futures' Strategic review of Fire & 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. In November 2010 it was agreed at the Community safety Delegated Committee that the South East Regional Management Board be wound-up until such time that the primary legislation is amended. It was also agreed that the South East Fire Improvement Partnership would replace the South East RMB. This is now called the 'South East Chief Fire Officers and Fire Authority Chairman's meeting'.

## **Collaboration**

7. As a County Council Fire & Rescue Service, in which an extensive Shared Services project has been successfully implemented, it is acknowledged that there is limited opportunity to achieve any further savings from any back office functions. In order to protect front line services, and to maintain operational resilience, a collaborative approach to managing sector specific service delivery is the only achievable option in order to achieve the existing efficiency savings identified within the medium term financial plan.
8. It was considered that the three projects indicated for initial scoping studies as part of a South East region (nine fire authorities) would be unrealistic and too complex to achieve an overall consensus therefore a Thames valley approach is the preferred option.
9. As discussed earlier in this report the three projects that have been agreed by the Thames Valley Chief Fire Officers for further investigation are:

## CMDSSC4

- (a) **Project 1** - Sharing of high level operationally related Health & Safety (H&S) policy and strategy provision. Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Fire Authority to lead. The objectives being:

Increased efficiencies & resilience via:

- Increased potential to deliver savings against the existing medium term financial plan.
- Increased H&S Team resilience – Provision of a single shared team providing access to more resources with a greater diversity of staff experience.
- Improved efficiency through common and consistent policies – A reduction in duplication of work across the three FRAs.
- Improved efficiency through shared practitioners – A combined approach to H&S advice, central management and policy/procedure development would provide efficiency savings across the three services.
- Increased independence – A team representing all 3 FRS will be less restricted by local issues or influences as it's members would be drawn from the 3 FRAs allowing a sensitive issue in one FRS to be investigated by staff from the other 2 FRAs.
- Provide a model for future sharing of services – Lessons learnt in this collaborative venture will support development of a framework for future collaboration across the 3 FRAs.
- Potential for increased levels of awareness and compliance with health & safety legislation.

- (b) **Project 2** - To assess whether there can be a similar common policy development process for Fire Safety Enforcement to include inspection protocols, enforcement procedures and fire engineering advice. Oxfordshire Fire Authority to lead. The objectives being:

Increased efficiencies & resilience via:

- Increased potential to deliver existing efficiencies already identified within the medium term financial plan.
- Fire safety enforcement - Cross border support for enforcement actions & audits.
- Joint fire safety enforcement procedures – The production of new and harmonisation of existing.
- Joint fire safety guidance for inspecting officers – The production of new and harmonisation of existing.
- Joint fire safety training – The production of joint training materials, the use of joint training events & the joint use of Fire Protection training personnel.
- Joint Technical Fire Protection support – The joint use of Fire Engineers & Fire Protection technical “help desks”.
- Joint Access to Legal Advice.

## CMDSSC4

- A common ICT Platform.
  - A single Joint Fire Protection management team.
  - Consistency of approach for businesses across the Thames Valley area.
- (c) **Project 3** - A study of operational officer cover arrangements, including issues such as the provision of Fire Investigation, Accident Investigation, Fire Safety Enforcement, Post Fire Inspection and New Dimension (Resilience) cover. Consideration is also to be given to a common incident command system, common training and assessment and the interoperability of rota systems. This review is to cover roles from Station Manager to Brigade Manager. Royal Berkshire Fire Authority to lead. The objectives being:

Increased efficiencies & resilience via:

- Increased potential to deliver existing efficiencies already identified within the medium term financial plan.
- Cross border officer sharing – The joint use of officers from Station Manager to Brigade manager across the three Fire Authorities to manage incidents and other issues at short notice with individual reassurance at a strategic level.
- Cross border specialist officer sharing – The joint use of officers from Station Manager to Brigade Manager to deal with issues of a specialist nature such as accident investigation (major, moderate & minor), fire safety enforcement, fire investigation, Hazardous materials & Environmental Protection (HMEP) & New Dimension - Detection Identification & Monitoring (DIM).
- Joint Training – The production of joint training materials & the use of joint training events.
- Interoperability of rota systems – The assessment of a common rota system across the Thames Valley FRAs enabling officer resource to be managed more effectively.
- The ability to provide additional resilience for spate conditions such as inclement weather or widespread flooding.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

10. All financial and staff implications will be identified within the subsequent project briefs for the individual projects.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

11. **The Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities is RECOMMENDED to:**
- (a) **authorise the Chief Fire Officer to commence a formal collaboration programme between Oxfordshire County Council Fire Authority, Royal Berkshire Fire Authority & Buckinghamshire**

**& Milton Keynes Fire Authority to improve operational & organisational resilience & realise efficiencies whilst maintaining existing governance structures;**

- (b) request the Chief Fire Officer to provide regular updates at appropriate times on project progress and delivery of efficiencies against the savings targets identified within the medium term financial plan.**

DAVE ETHERIDGE  
Chief Fire Officer

Background papers: N/A

Contact Officer: Dave Etheridge, Chief Fire Officer, Tel: 01865 855205

March 2011