



## National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy

### Ministers and the LGA agree a £185m joint National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy for 2008-11

The National Improvement and Efficiency Strategy (NIES) was released on the 21 December 2007. It is available from <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/localgovernment/pdf/649026>

Largely it is a strategy to assist the delivery of 'excellent Local Area Agreements' but many of the principles are ones which fire and rescue authorities will have an interest in.

In this newsletter we have summarised the 4 sections of the strategy to provide you with an overview of its contents. We hope you find this both useful and informative.

### The Foreword and Introduction

The foreword sets out the need for "strong leadership, [in place shaping] which is a role and responsibility for local government, led by...elected councillors and working with other providers of local services."

The NIES is to be followed in Spring 2008 with a prospectus which will set out further support, priorities and resources.

### Section 1 Ambition, context and principles

The shared vision is for better, more responsive public services that "ensure greater local prosperity and environmental sustainability". The principles that guide the strategy are:

- Improvement is to be led by Councils working in partnership with local communities and other public

service providers... through devolving resources as close to the frontline as possible, with greater local decision making together with their partners

- Strategic planning of improvement needs to become stronger through greater joint decision making on the resources available to support local improvement, innovation and efficiency
- The arrangements for offering improvement and efficiency support from both central and local government need to be effective, simplified and rationalised

### Section 2 Strategic Priorities

#### Local Ownership of Improvement

Support for delivering LAAs will focus on equipping local authorities and partners with the capacity and skills needed to lead local partnerships and deliver effective efficient services that deliver shared priorities. In supporting the delivery of LAA priorities there are four underpinning national priorities:

- Improving value for money to meet the 3% efficiency target (for fire and rescue services this is For Fire and Rescue Authorities the efficiency target is 1.6% as a minimum).
- Increasing innovative capacity to respond to future challenges
- Community empowerment
- Improving economic and neighbourhood renewal leadership capacity locally.

### Section 3 Delivering on the principles

1. Local ownership of improvement. This will be achieved by:

- Developing the capacity of RIEPs: placing Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships at the heart of delivery support arrangements;
- Better Co-ordination of Support: leading within sector the co-ordinated support of Councils/FRAs in

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difficulty and tackling poor performance where exists;

- **Accountability:** Putting in place strong arrangements to ensure that improvement support is correctly targeted. Accountability should mean that councils and partnerships know what to expect from their RIEP, so that they can influence priorities, and hold the RIEP to account.

## 2. Devolving a greater proportion of central and local government improvement resources.

RIEPs will prepare three-year strategies for improvement and efficiency to ensure an ambitious programme of transformation is mapped out, and report on progress on an annual basis.

## 3. Stronger strategic planning of improvement needs.

As part of the CSR07 £384m, comprising RSG top-slice and CLG support, would be available to help deliver this strategy in the period 2008/11.

## 4. Simplifying the current improvement and efficiency architecture.

The strategy sets out an overarching commitment that no new central or local improvement support bodies will be created without prior consultation, or new programmes except in exceptional circumstances. Also

- an overall change to improvement support, through changes to the LGA and central bodies' business planning and commissioning process; and changes in the way in which Government departments deploy their resources
- a genuine reduction in the actual number of improvement bodies to remove duplication and overlap

To reduce costs to councils and improve standards IDeA will explore benefits to local government and partners from a national approach to the accreditation of suppliers.

## Section 4 Measuring success and governance arrangements

There is no single measure of success. The 2008 Prospectus will provide detail of specific metrics for success which may include.

- At a local level through self assessment and evidence of value for money and delivery of LAA targets
- At a regional level by how much Improvement and Efficiency Partnerships have delivered their strategies agreed with Government and LGA
- At a national level improved outcomes as articulated in the national indicator set
- Ability of places to meet demanding efficiency targets
- Progress made in simplifying support arrangements
- Better value for money on local service improvement spend.

**Acknowledgements: SEFIP is grateful to Dominic Wallace of the Kent Improvement and Efficiency Partnership for the précis on which this document is based. Any comments and queries should be directed to the SEFIP Team.**

## What does this mean for Fire?

The South East uniquely has sub-regional improvement partnerships which will be concentrating on supporting authorities in the development of local LAAs. Fire and Rescue Authorities are engaged at local levels with partners to deliver excellent LAAs. However, fire also has specific needs, which are well-evidenced in the bid that has been put forward to the Board, around meeting the National Framework.

The NIES in many ways reinforces the role of SEFIP and the products it has developed to date, such as the peer review brokering service. Improvement partnerships are being seen as the first port of call for improvement support – in conjunction with Chief Fire Officers', SEFIP will broker improvement deals with other agencies as required. It also places Elected Members at the centre of the Improvement Agenda and we will ensure that the development opportunities made available through SEFIP allow Members to continue to meet this role.

Through the Chairman of the Improvement work area of the Regional Management Board, we will continue to lobby to achieve the best outcome we can to ensure that fire can also contribute fully to LAAs in their areas through innovative capacity building development products and partnership building techniques. We will also seek to build the capacity needed to ensure that Members aspirations are met in relation to for example the national framework and the national equality and diversity strategy.

## How could the 2008-11 funding distribution work Fire and Rescue Services?

