

By: James Finch
To: SEFIP Board – 3 October 2012
Subject: NATIONAL FRAMEWORK
Classification: Unrestricted

FOR DECISION

SUMMARY

The government published the new Fire & Rescue National Framework for England in July 2012. The Framework has changed very little since the draft version was published for consultation and, as expected, removes the requirement for Regional Management Boards.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are requested to:

1. Note that the requirement to operate a Regional Management Board has been formally removed from the National Framework;
2. Agree to wind-up the formal South East Regional Management Board but continue to hold less formal SEFIP Board meetings as often as necessary;
3. Agree that future meetings will be held in the most convenient location, even if this is outside of the South East; and
4. Agree that these meetings will continue to be held in public and the minutes published on the SEFIP website to maintain transparency.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS: None

COMMENTS

1. Members will recall that the draft National Framework was published in the spring and SEFIP agreed a response to the consultation. It is somewhat disappointing to note that the final version of the Framework varies very little from the draft document and few, if any, of the comments made have been addressed.
2. The Framework is less prescriptive in the ways that FRAs should work in partnership with others and, as expected, there is no mention of Regional Management Boards or regional structures at all. This is seen as tacit approval from the Government that RMBs can effectively be disbanded in their current form, and replaced with whatever vehicle for collaboration makes most sense locally.
3. In the South East, there is a strong desire for Chairs/Portfolio Holders of each Authority to continue to meet as the South East Fire Improvement Partnership Board, supported by a meeting of the South East Chief Fire Officers/Chief Executives group on a regular basis. However, these meetings can now become much more informal in nature and meet as often as required in order to carry out the business needed. This also allows all meetings to be held in the most convenient location even if this is outside of the region. However, it is recommended that the meetings remain in public and the minutes are published on the SEFIP website in order to maintain transparency.
4. The National Framework includes a number of areas where Fire & Rescue Authorities are required to work collaboratively to improve intraoperability, national resilience and efficiency. These were included within the draft document and have already been reflected in the current SEFIP business plan. Further guidance is expected from government on some of these requirements, but the fact that the South East has a well established board, and delivery structures sitting underneath it, puts it in a good position.
5. Members will also want to note that the Framework has an open-ended lifespan, indicating that the Government does not plan to refresh it every three years as has previously been the case.

IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6. The National Framework contains a large section on national resilience issues and any gap that exists between the Government's expectations and what is currently being delivered locally by FRAs. The Framework, however, remains unclear about the funding mechanism for closing any gaps which are identified.

CONCLUSION

7. Members are requested to:

7.1 Note that the requirement to operate a Regional Management Board has been formally removed from the National Framework;

7.2 Agree to wind-up the formal South East Regional Management Board but continue to hold less formal SEFIP Board meetings as often as necessary;

7.3 Agree that future meetings will be held in the most convenient location, even if this is outside of the South East; and

7.4 Agree that these meetings will continue to be held in public and the minutes published on the SEFIP website to maintain transparency.