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Cessation of the South East Regional Management Board

Report by the Chief Officer

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1 Summary

- 1.1 Recent announcements by the government have changed the political landscape for collaborative working by fire and rescue authorities, and the report makes proposals for how such work should be progressed in the South East Region in the future.
- 1.2 The report also updates Members on the work of the South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP), which Kent Fire and Rescue Service administers on behalf of the region. One of SEFIP's roles is to provide the programme management function to the South East Fire and Rescue Services' Regional Management Board, and the minutes of the last meeting are attached to this report.

2 Recommendations

Members are asked to;

- 2.1 agree to support the winding-up of the South East Fire and Rescue Services' Regional Management Board (RMB) at the appropriate time, and the reinstatement of regular Chairs/Portfolio Holders and Chiefs meetings in its place.
- 2.2 note the update on the work of the South East Fire Improvement Partnership and the draft minutes of the last meeting of the RMB.

3 Introduction and background

- 3.1 Significant announcements have been made recently regarding how fire and rescue services work together. Specifically, in relation to regional working, at the launch of the Fire Futures' Strategic Review of the Fire and Rescue Service on 28 July, the Minister announced that 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.
- 3.2 At the last meeting of the South East Fire and Rescue Services' Regional Management Board (RMB) held on 6 October, the South East Fire Improvement

Partnership (SEFIP), whose remit is to encourage collaboration between fire and rescue authorities in the South East (FRAs), and to generate efficiency savings, took a paper anticipating the announcement of the demise of the RMB. This set out principles for how services in the South East would seek to work together if RMBs were abolished. These principles are outlined below:

- If RMBs are abolished, the South East will reinstate the Chairs/Portfolio Holders and Chiefs meeting which was held before RMBs were created in 2004;
- If projects come forward with a robust business case and the opportunity for savings and return on investment, FRAs will look where possible to provide some level of invest-to-save funding;
- That SEFIP be authorised to look for alternative funding streams where appropriate to match-fund any FRA contributions to projects;
- That SEFIP will remain a member of the Improvement and Efficiency Partnership for as long as the regional structure remains for other parts of local government, or any replacement mechanism which develops.

4 Cessation of the South East Regional Management Board

- 4.1 Regional Management Boards are set up under primary legislation and, under the terms of the RMB's constitution, there is no provision for the RMB to abolish itself. This is a decision which would need to be taken by each FRA in the region. 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.
- 4.2 After the RMB has been dissolved, the regular meetings of Chairs/Portfolio Holders and Chiefs could be reinstated (subject to all the FRAs in the region agreeing to this). It is anticipated that that these would not be public meetings, although papers and minutes would be made available on the SEFIP website as part of its commitment to open government. There is little to be gained from not posting the papers in the public domain as they would be available under the Freedom of Information Act.
- 4.3 Whilst the work undertaken under the aegis of the RMB has been productive and has delivered significant efficiency savings (for example, last year £2.4m of cashable and non-cashable savings were generated), it is arguable that formal joint committee arrangements add little to collaborative working and similar outcomes could be realised through a less formal constitution. The Authority is therefore recommended to support the winding-up of the RMB at the appropriate time and to support the re-formation of a Chairs and Chiefs meeting arrangement along the lines described above.

5 South East Fire Improvement Partnership Update

- 5.1 Kent Fire and Rescue Authority has administered the South East Fire Improvement

Partnership (SEFIP) since it was created by the RMB in 2006. Although SEFIP will be drawing down more improvement and efficiency funding for at least one more year, there is no further information at the time of writing on the success or otherwise of SEFIP's bid for funding from the regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership.

6 Minutes of the Regional Management Board

- 6.1 Since regional issues were last reported to the Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee on 18 November, there has not been a meeting of the SE Regional Management Board.

7 Supporting our Corporate Aims and Objectives

- 7.1 We continue to remain committed to working with other Services within the South East region in order to identify opportunities to achieve greater efficiencies.

8 People Impact Assessment

- 8.1 Members will note that fire and rescue services within the South East will continue to work together, however the mechanics of doing so will be more fluid in the future. Nevertheless, proper business cases and an assessment of savings will need to be maintained for all projects that SEFIP has commissioned on behalf of Chairs/Portfolio Holders and Chiefs. This is because for at least one more year, SEFIP will be drawing down more improvement and efficiency funding.

9 Risk Analysis

- 9.1 Considerable benefit has accrued for being a member of the SE Fire Improvement Partnership in terms of invest to save funding. Should the Authority withdraw from the partnership, future funding would cease.

10 People Impact Assessment

- 10.1 The proposals in this report are considered compatible with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

11 Environmental and Sustainability Impact Assessment

- 11.1 There is deemed to be no environmental or sustainability impact from this decision.

12 Resource implications

- 12.1 No physical, financial or information communication technology resources have been identified. However, the Chief Officer and Chair of the Fire Authority will be required to attend quarterly Chief and Chairs meetings. Currently, SEFIP is in receipt of grant funding which covers minimum overhead costs. Should this cease, then if the Authority wishes to continue SEFIP there may be a requirement for a

financial contribution. This is likely to be under £2000 but would be the subject of further reports to the Authority.

13 Consultation

- 13.1 All Members within the South East region are being asked to agree to support the cessation of the South East Fire and Rescue Services' Regional Management Board.

14 Conclusion

Members are requested to:

- 14.1 Agree to support the winding-up of the South East Fire and Rescue Services' Regional Management Board (RMB) at the appropriate time, and the reinstatement of regular Chairs/Portfolio Holders and Chiefs meetings in its place.
- 14.2 Note the update on the work of the South East Fire Improvement Partnership and the draft minutes of the last meeting of the RMB.

15 Background papers

- 15.1 The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

None

Note: The list excludes: (1) published works; and (2) documents that disclose exempt or confidential information defined in the Act.