

10 February 2010

South East Fire and Rescue Services Regional Management Board: update following meeting held on 27th January 2010

Report by the Chief Officer

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1 Summary

- 1.1 The last meeting of the South East Fire and Rescue Services Regional Management Board (SERMB) was held on 27 January 2010 and was attended by the Chairman, Councillor Royston Smith. He was accompanied by the Director of Service Delivery, Dave Curry. This report highlights some of the key issues discussed at the meeting.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the report be noted.

3 Progress against the Board's Action Plan

- 3.1 The Board considered a progress report against each of the work areas in the regional business plan 2008/11 for the period October to December 2009. This included; community safety, response and resilience, improvement, human resources and training, environment, procurement and media and communications. The significant points of note were:
- The Government has called for evidence for a further Select Committee inquiry into the Regional Control Centre project. A South East region submission, which was approved by the Chairs of each fire and rescue authority, was submitted as evidence and is attached as appendix A for Members' information. In his capacity as President of the Chief Fire Officers' Association, Chief Officer John Bonney, has been called to provide oral evidence at the Select Committee taking place on 8 February.
 - Members noted that £1.1m of efficiency savings had been achieved this year. A letter from Stephen Cloughton, Deputy Director of Finance and Performance, at Communities and Local Government, was referred to, congratulating the SE RMB on its delivery of efficiency savings, as reported in the 2008/9 and 2009/10 Annual Efficiency Statements. The Board were particularly pleased to note the SERMB achieved £539k

efficiency savings in 2008/9 compared to the average for RMBs of £292k.

- Good progress continues to be made within the four major regional procurement projects. At the last meeting of the Authority it was reported that a framework contract for work wear had been awarded in August 2009. All nine FRAs in the region have agreed to adopt the common uniform and work wear will be available from April 2010. The technical and service specifications for personal protective equipment (PPE) were completed and agreed in October 2009. The Board were pleased to note that the Eastern Region had made an approach to the South East to become part of the project.

4 Regional Control Centre Update

- 4.1 Roy Beavis (RCC Project Director) provided an update on FiReControl. He reported that the project organisation and revised governance arrangements were in place and sufficiently robust and that risks remained manageable. March was highlighted as a critical time due to the National Audit Office's review and the Select Committee's Inquiry into FiReControl.
- 4.2 The report presented to the Board highlighted frustrations experienced by the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) and Ministers in relation to poor quality issues with 'EADS' (the main contractor). It is understood that EADS has responded robustly to CLG's concerns by making senior management changes and improving their quality assurance processes.
- 4.3 The Board were also asked to note that EADS had changed one of its sub-contractors (from Ericsson to Integraph) for the delivery of the mobilising system - a key part of the FiReControl solution. The impact of this change is being assessed against the proposed timescales.
- 4.4 As part of routine project risk mitigation, the Board were assured that work in the South East was progressing in relation to fallback options should the project run into difficulties. However, the Board were in agreement that Plan A (full implementation of the RCC project) remains the South East's preferred option due to the significant amount of time and financial investment to date. An away-day has been scheduled for 15 March 2010 to provide the Board with an opportunity to consider alternative solutions. It was agreed that Stewart Jackson MP, Shadow Minister for Fire, would be invited to the meeting.

5 Sprinklers for New Homes – A Legislative Framework

- 5.1 At the Authority meeting held in December, the Chief Officer agreed to seek the SE RMB's view on whether to lobby government for the mandatory installation of sprinklers in all new domestic properties. This matter was initially raised by Councillor Keith Chapman following his attendance at a House of Commons Select Committee on 5 November, and prompted by the proposed 'National Assembly for Wales (Legislative Competence) (Housing) Order 2009', which

has subsequently been supported by all Welsh Assembly Members.

- 5.2 The Legislative Competence Order (LCO), which is expected to pass votes in both Houses of Parliament before gaining Royal assent in the coming weeks, will require all new-build housing in Wales to be fitted with a fire sprinkler system.
- 5.3 The Board endorsed formal representation being made to CLG lobbying for a similar legislative outcome to that achieved by the Welsh Assembly Government and approved the submission of letters to the Minister responsible for fire and rescue services and the South East Regional Select Committee on Housing in the South East. (Copies of both submissions are attached as appendices B and C).

6 Equality and Diversity Update

- 6.1 Members considered a report from CFO Hendry summarising the outcomes of the second South East Fire Improvement Partnership Operational Diversity conference held on 23 September, progress against the regional target and the sharing of good practice.
- 6.2 The Board were advised that three fire and rescue authorities in the region are still to achieve level three of the equality standard, or its equivalent under the new framework. Work is underway to identify common areas requiring development which can be progressed collaboratively or through the sharing of good practice and initiatives. As part of the new business plan for 2010/13 the report highlights that consideration is currently being given to setting a new target for all FRAs to achieve excellence under the new framework by March 2013.

7 Freedom to Lead: A discussion paper by the Local Government Association

- 7.1 The Board considered a report from CFO Hendry on the Local Government Association's discussion document, issued in November 2009, entitled 'Freedom to Lead: Developing a New Accountability Framework'. Following the release of this document, the Board were advised that it is the South East Fire Improvement Partnership's intention to hold a seminar on new and emerging themes for fire and rescue services. Some of the issues being proposed for debate include; Total Place pilots, 'new localism', the role of agencies such as 'GOSE' and the environment and use of resources assessment 2010/11.

8 People Impact Assessment

- 8.1 There are no issues arising from this report and it is considered compatible with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 and the People Impact Assessment for this project.

Background Information (Section 100D of Local Government Act 1972)

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:

- Agenda, reports and draft minutes of the South East Fire and Rescue Services Regional Management Board meeting held 27 January 2010.

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Appendices:

- Appendix A - South East RMB's Submission to CLG's Select Committee FiReControl Inquiry
- Appendix B - South East RMB's Letter to Shahid Malik MP reference sprinklers for new homes
- Appendix C - South East RMB's Letter to the South East Regional Select Committee's Inquiry on Housing in the South East

