

Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee

18 November 2010

South East Fire and Rescue Services Regional Management Board: Update following Meeting held on 6 October 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 (SE RMB) was held on 6 October 2010 and was attended by Councillor Royston Smith. This meeting was followed by a Members Away Afternoon. He was accompanied by Chief Officer John Bonney and the Director of Service Delivery, Dave Curry. This report highlights some of the key issues discussed at the meeting.

2 Recommendation

2.1 As per the revised Terms of Reference of the Performance Review and Scrutiny Committee, it is recommended that the report is supported, and any key issues are raised at the full Fire Authority Meeting.

3 Correspondence

3.1 There had been a letter exchange between the Chairman of the SE RMB and the Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP regarding fire suppression systems (Appendix A and B).

3.2 Concerns were raised that the Minister's response had concentrated on industry and commerce and did not address the need for sprinkler systems in residential premises. An amendment to existing Building Regulations was required, rather than new regulation, to ensure the installation of domestic sprinkler systems. It was suggested that the Board consider writing again to the Minister.

3.3 CFO Bonney suggested seeking the support of the Association of British Insurers (ABI) in the promotion of domestic sprinkler systems. He also suggested considering the timing of a further correspondence to coincide with the outcomes of the proposal currently being progressed by the National Assembly for Wales.

- 3.4 It was resolved that a letter would be sent to the Ministers responsible for Fire, as well as the Minister for Housing and Building Control, promoting the need for an amendment to current regulations to require automatic fire suppression systems in new residential premises in England and drawing attention to the progress of the legislation in Wales. The Chairman was also asked to share the letter with other Regional Management Boards.

4 FiReControl Project Update

- 4.1 A report was presented to update Members on the current situation in relation to the FiReControl Project. There had been little change since June 2010. Both EADS and the Communities and Local Government (CLG) were continuing to work towards the delivery of FiReControl, although confidence was being undermined by the poor customer/supplier relationship and the success criteria being set by the Fire Minister. The South East Fire and Rescue Services were, however, in a good position to deal with changes if required. The risk profile remained unchanged and due regard was being given to the outcomes should the milestones not be delivered.
- 4.2 Councillor Kemble, Chairman of East Sussex Fire Authority, reported that the South East LACC had decided not to sign a lease for the RCC premises for the foreseeable future until the successful outcome of the FiReControl project was more certain.

5 Consultation on Revenue Support Grant top slice for Improvement Services

- 5.1 CLG was consulting RMB's on proposals for the future of the Revenue Support Grant top slice which was used to support bodies that provided services to Local Authorities. The proposals included reducing the annual top slice funding by 30% and establishing a sole specified body to receive top slice funding who would decide how best to use it. Members' views were sought on these proposals and whether the sole specified body should be the Local Government Association or Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly the Improvement and Development Agency).

6 Equality and Diversity Update

- 6.1 Fire and Rescue Services had been actively promoting equality and diversity during the previous quarter. The Chief Fire Officers Association and East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service had arranged a conference in Brighton on 6 August entitled 'Pride and No Prejudice' and over 100 delegates had attended. A Parade had also taken place on 7 August. We distributed 20,000 'Fire Safety in the Home' leaflets at the event.

7 Future of the South East Regional Management Boards

- 7.1 Members were informed of the announcements by the Minister for Fire to allow Fire Authorities to decide if they wished to maintain the Regional Management Board in their area, and the Board considered the implications of this announcement on regional activity within the south east.
- 7.2 Members noted that the SE RMB currently had no power to dissolve itself, however, individual Fire and Rescue Authorities would need to consider the position within their own Authority and decide upon future arrangements for collaborative working.
- 7.3 Members considered that a future change in working arrangements would provide an opportunity for the SE RMB to review its terms of reference, including the format of agendas and the reporting arrangements, that had so far been influenced by the requirements in the National Framework. It was suggested that the SE RMB should refocus its role to work as a scrutiny group, act as a challenge to officers and influence the direction of travel on national issues.
- 7.4 It was suggested that each Member of the Board consider within their own Authority, the option to close the Regional Management Board at the appropriate time. It is suggested that the appropriate time for Hampshire would be when the formal legislative requirement to maintain an RMB is removed.
- 7.5 It was also agreed that until any formal decision is taken to abolish the South East Regional Management Board in its current form, the SE RMB be re-named 'The South East Fire Improvement Partnership Board' (SEFIP Board).

8 Afternoon Awareness and Discussions Items

- 8.1 Members remained following the formal meeting to allow Officers the opportunity to brief Members in more detail on key issues. This also allowed useful time to discuss and debate agreed positions. Areas covered included the Fire Control Project and contingency arrangements if the Project fails, the progress made in the South East on converging operational procedures, and an agreed position for the RMB's submission to the Fire Futures Review.

9 People Impact Assessment

- 9.1 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, 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 have 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 6 October 2010.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter from Chairman to Bob Neill MP, regarding fire suppression systems (20 July 2010)

Appendix B: Letter from Bob Neill MP to the Chairman regarding fire suppression systems (17 September 2010)