

# HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CABINET**  
**MONDAY 26 JANUARY 2004 AT 2.00P.M.**

Agenda Item No.

**6**

## **REGIONAL FIRE MANAGEMENT BOARDS**

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Author: Steve Seaber, Chief Fire Officer (01992 507500)

Executive Member: Iris Tarry

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

To seek approval from the Cabinet to set up a Joint Committee with the other five Fire Authorities in the East of England and to delegate to the Joint Committee certain functions of the Authority.

#### **2. Summary**

The report lays out the expectations of the Government with regard to the establishment of Regional Fire Management Boards and the delegation to these Boards of certain functions from individual Fire Authorities.

The six constituent Fire Authorities for the Eastern Region have proposed that the existing voluntary Forum of members be formalised to create the basis for the Regional Management Board in the East of England. It is also proposed that the model constitution developed by the LGA for RMBs be adopted.

#### **3. Conclusion**

That the Regional Fire Management Board be established on the basis of one representative of each constituent authority.

That the draft constitution developed by the LGA be used as the constitution for the East of England Regional Fire Management Board.

That the support arrangements be provided by the constituent authorities as appropriate, with the associated costs of those arrangements being shared equally.

That the County Council be recommended to approve the necessary amendments to the Constitution

Cabinet is invited to consider the arrangements for the Council's participation in a Regional Fire Management Board, including the delegation of functions, representation and support arrangements.

## **1. Background**

The White Paper “Our Fire and Rescue Service” outlined the requirement for “voluntary” Regional Fire Management Boards to be in place by 1 April 2004.

The Government believes that a regional perspective is more appropriate for fire authorities. In those areas that elect regional assemblies the Government will establish regional fire and rescue authorities. Elsewhere it wishes to see regional management boards for those parts of the service that the Government considers are best managed regionally.

These Boards would be responsible for “discharging six key areas of activity”:

- Ensuring resilience to emergencies, especially potential chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear attack
- Specialist or common services, where appropriate, such as fire investigation
- Establishing regional control rooms
- Introducing regional-based procurement or procurement to national standards
- Developing regional training strategies and delivery
- Introducing regional personnel management and business resource management functions

In responding to the White Paper, Hertfordshire expressed support for collaboration for service specific functions but strong concern over the benefits of collaborating in areas where the economies of scale would be less than those already achieved from within the County Council.

The Government published the Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework on 11 December which provided further and more specific guidance on areas of collaboration, most notably the requirement for Regional Boards to identify a location for a Regional Control Centre by 1 April 2004.

Whilst this paper has been issued for consultation, it is clearly a statement of intent to significant regional collaboration and does not appear to recognise that some of the services identified are integrated into County Council structures. A paper will be presented to a future Cabinet meeting to assist in preparing a response to the Draft Framework document.

## **2. Representation**

One of the most contentious areas in the discussion to date has been the number of seats held by constituent authorities. Three models have been proposed in discussions to date:

- Each authority having a single representative.
- Authorities having an equal number of representatives regardless of the size of the constituent authorities.

- Distribution of seats according to the proportionate size of the authorities and the political make up.

It is evident that RMBs are being established in each of the three models outlined above.

The East of England Forum has been meeting for over four years and has overseen collaboration in a number of areas of activity, particularly Best Value and early work in the Procurement of a Replacement Radio System.

To meet the expectations set out in the White Paper it is sensible for the East of England Forum to become the regional management board for the area as a joint committee of the constituent authorities having delegated to it all the functions and terms of reference specified above. The East of England Forum consists of the constituent Fire Authorities of Bedfordshire and Luton, Cambridgeshire & Peterborough, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk.

Membership consists of the six executive members or chairmen from the constituent authorities, advised by their Chief Fire Officers. The Forum is of the opinion that these arrangements would provide a basis for the Regional Fire Management Board supported by the necessary constitutional arrangements.

Officers have been tasked to draw up arrangements for a Regional Fire Management Board with each authority represented by its Executive Member or Chairman or a named substitute. Constitutional arrangements will be developed drawn from the LGA proposals.

### **3. Model Constitution**

The LGA has, with the help of advisers, established a model constitution which was published on 3 November 2003. The guidance indicates that to meet the Government's requirement formal arrangements will need to be established utilising Section 102 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Board would be required to comply with Corporate Government Standards including Access to Information Act, regarding public access to agendas and meetings. It would also require its own standing orders and legal and financial support arrangements which could be provided by a standalone support function or utilise existing authority resources.

Legal Advisers to the six fire authorities in the Eastern Region have considered the LGA Model Constitution. It is proposed that this be adopted as the Constitution for the East of England Regional Management Board.

### **4. Working Practices**

There are a number of approaches that could be utilised to deliver the requirements of collaborative activities. These include:

- ◆ Lead authorities taking responsibility for the delivery on behalf of the six fire authorities. These could be service specific or in more corporate support activities.
- ◆ Joint project teams with representatives from all or some of the fire authorities in the region.
- ◆ Outsourcing to other fire authorities, public sector or private sector organisations.

## **5. Support Structure**

It will be necessary for clerical, legal and financial support to be provided for the Board. It is proposed that the clerical and legal support is provided by the existing Clerk to Cambridgeshire who is employed by them on a part time basis. The three county council fire authorities have been asked if they could provide the financial management support. It may also be appropriate for similar arrangements for legal, administration and ICT services to be established as the structure and workload of the Regional Management Board is developed.

## **6. Financial Implications**

The proposals for a Regional Fire Management Board to discharge certain specified functions will ultimately require funding for these activities from the constituent authorities. This will require significant debate and consideration as the roles and duties of the Regional Management Boards are agreed.

However, there will be costs associated with establishing the Board and maintenance. The Executive Members and Chairmen recommended that for 2004/05 a contribution of £25k could be requested from each authority to support the management of the Board which could be financed from the transitional funding being allocated by Central Government to deliver the Modernisation Agenda.

It is anticipated that the funding of work undertaken by the Regional Fire Management Board will be shared between the constituent fire authorities and agreed at the meeting of the Board held in December of each year.

### *Background Papers:*

*The Government White Paper "Our Fire and Rescue Service"*

*The Government Draft Fire and Rescue National Framework Document*