



## **South West Fire and Rescue Services' Newsletter January 2009**

### **Introduction by Darran Gunter**

Firstly, may I start by wishing everyone a very happy New Year and welcome to South West Fire and Rescue Services' quarterly newsletter.

It looks like 2009 will be a challenging year for the fire and rescue service as well as the rest of the economy. The challenges (at this stage!) include the impact of the recession on the service, the first round of Comprehensive Area Assessments (CAA), mitigating and adapting to the impact of Climate Change; Equality and Diversity and above all providing an efficient and effective fire and rescue service under increasing resource constraints.

I am proud to say that here in the South West we have a programme of collaboration that addresses all of these issues. For example, we will be monitoring the impact of the recession through the regional benchmarking group. Des Tidbury (Wilts FRS) is leading a sub-workstream to help us prepare for CAA; we are the first region to organise training and accreditation of a team of peer reviewers for the operational assurance of service delivery (OASD) element of the CAA; and I will be chairing a project group to produce a regional climate change strategy working closely with the Carbon Trust.

This edition includes articles on a number of projects being taken forward by the region's workstreams and information about the new regional Human Resources team. There are contact points at the end of each article if you would like to know more about a particular project.

One of the objectives of the regional programme of collaboration is to provide developmental opportunities for staff at all levels. Graham Saunders (Regional Programme Manager on 0117 926 2061 ext 253) would be pleased to discuss the opportunities with you or your line manager. Similarly I am happy to receive any feedback on the newsletter or any collaboration issues in the Southwest.

Best regards

Darran Gunter  
Secretary, CFOA SW

## **What lessons can South West FRSs learn from the 2008 local area agreement round?**

We are all working ever more closely with Local Government Partners, but how do we know what they feel the contribution of Fire Services should be and how well do we get our safety message across? Comprehensive Area Assessment brings the need to be able to define how we influence our partners for the benefit of our communities and one of the key elements in this is how we interact with and within the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSP) and how we aid the achievement of the 35 priority targets set by each Local Area Agreement (LAA). However, if Fire & Rescue Services cannot influence our LSP partners and get our core community safety message across and into 35 priority targets we will have missed a real opportunity to make our communities safer.

Local authorities have prepared local area agreements (LAA) for delivering an agreed set of priorities, reflecting the needs of their local communities as set out in the sustainable community strategies. In doing so they are required to consult LSP partners on the preparation of the LAA which establish an agreed set of up to 35 priority improvement targets for the area to be negotiated and agreed by the Government Office and to be delivered by LSP partners. Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) have a duty to cooperate with the principal lead authority for each LAA in setting those targets and be required to have regard to the targets selected by each LAA. The targets are drawn from the set of 198 National Indicators.

LAAs cover a three year period, with the first being agreed in June 2008 and the next round is due in 2010. LAAs are structured around four themes: children and young people; safer and stronger communities; healthier communities and older people; with economic development and enterprise to be introduced from Round 2 onwards.

So how did we do in round one? Well to be honest not very well. Although there is evidence of good working at a local partnership level with some interesting and rewarding projects, neither of the two Fire National indicators NI 33 and 49 has been included in the list of priority outcomes identified by the LAAs in the region. Similarly, anecdotal evidence suggests that Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) have generally not appreciated how SWFRSs can help them meet a wide range of local priorities and national indicators, or indeed how they can help us deliver a more effective service. Many local authority officers still see the FRS role as primarily one of responding to emergencies. There is still not enough awareness of the educational and public engagement roles that FRS conduct as part of their prevention activities.

We have obtained funding from the South West Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (SW RIEP) to undertake a survey of the lessons learnt for South West Fire & Rescue Services and LSPs of the 2008 round of local area agreements.

The Survey will take the form of a questionnaire and a series of interviews with FRS staff, elected members and LSP partners. Two FRSs (one combined authority and one county council service) outside the region that are regarded by the Audit Commission as being highly effective in engaging LSPs will be asked to participate in the Survey.

The findings of the Survey will be used to: -

- Identify examples of good practice of how FRAs were able to promote their contribution to delivering targets suggested by LSP partners and actively influence an LSP key delivery mechanisms;
- Form the basis of a series of facilitated workshops between each SW FRS and the main partners in their LSPs to discuss the findings of the survey and agree action plans to embed best practice and deal with any specific issues identified in the survey relating to the LSP and FRS;
- Identify the data needs to provide evidence of the contribution that FRSs can bring to delivering priority outcomes for SW LSPs;
- Develop a template of a stakeholder analysis;
- Form the basis of a regional seminar;
- Identify the need for further projects to address any weaknesses identified in the survey.

The contract for the survey work has just been awarded to Warwick Equest Limited and work starts in January with surveys results being known by end of March. If you are asked to take part in the survey, all of your views will be very important to the findings of the survey and follow up action.

#### *Further information*

**Bob Ford**, Corporate Planning Manager, Dorset Fire & Rescue Service by email at [cpm@dorsetfire.gov.uk](mailto:cpm@dorsetfire.gov.uk) or by phone on 01305 252615.

### **Embedding equality and diversity into training**

Building on an initial idea from Dorset Fire & Rescue Service, Cornwall County Fire Brigade has developed a toolkit to help with mainstreaming equality and diversity throughout all courses delivered through its training departments. The idea is to assess course materials, but also to support and assist instructors in acting as role models and champions for equality, diversity and Core Values issues.

It is important to embed a mainstream equality and diversity throughout fire and rescue services and a Training Department plays a key role in this. A draft Toolkit has been developed to help with the assessment of the content of courses and to provide support and development for instructors. It uses concepts from the Fire Service College Quality Assurance Framework for Learning and Development in the Fire and Rescue Service, 2008, and links these with best practice.

The Training Department in Cornwall County Fire Brigade has agreed to help with a pilot and this will start early in 2009. Following the pilot, the toolkit will

be amended as needed and discussed further with the college, as well as being made available initially to services in the South West.

*Further information*

Julia Hatch, Cornwall FRS

[jhatch@fire.cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:jhatch@fire.cornwall.gov.uk)

## **The role of the Regional Procurement Team**

The main objective of the regional procurement function is ensuring the South West FRSs are supported in the process of selecting the goods and services they need both for frontline operations and corporate services. We also need to ensure they achieve value for money, meet all legislative requirements and take into consideration some of the wider service objectives, such as interoperability, equality and diversity and environmental concerns.

The South West FRSs spend about £45 million per annum on a wide range of goods and services, with over 5,000 different suppliers. To maximise our purchasing potential, we collaborate and consolidate our requirements where possible. Collaboration can mean complicated processes, longer timescales and wider consultation with stakeholders, but the results deliver a better quality of goods and services, with reduced costs. Since 2005, collaborative regional procurement has delivered savings in excess of £1.9 million.

The regional procurement function has responsibility for delivering contracts on behalf of the South West FRSs. This means that we work very closely with local procurement officers, other workstreams and operational staff to ensure all requirements are incorporated and standardised where appropriate and that the fire and rescue services are protected by using complaint processes and sound business terms and conditions. Local procurement teams have responsibility for implementing the regional arrangements, delivering their own local procurements and, in some instances, acting as lead authority on regional projects.

Over the past four years, the South West FRSs have been working hard to improve their procurement functions and practices. Most services have now appointed professional and dedicated procurement officers, implemented ICT solutions and focused their attention on delivering strategic projects using processes and practices in line with best value. However, with such a wide range of goods and services being bought, procurement not only has the difficulty of improving current practices but also deciding which projects take priority and liaison with a wide group of people with differing procurement experience and needs.

Although it's a challenging role, the South West is one of (if not the) the most successful regions to have delivered collaborative procurements in the fire and rescue service. The regional procurements range from hydraulic and road traffic collision equipment, breathing apparatus, to fire safety systems to purchasing cards. We also work closely with our partner agencies to identify

contracts within the wider public sector which are suitable for the region's fire and rescue services.

If any South West FRS projects are considered to have an element of procurement which could have the potential to be regional or collaborative, then services are asked to seek our involvement at the earliest opportunity, contact details below:

Melanie Walsh, Regional Procurement Manager, [mwalsh@dsfire.gov.uk](mailto:mwalsh@dsfire.gov.uk)  
John Story, Regional Procurement Officer, [jstory@dsfire.gov.uk](mailto:jstory@dsfire.gov.uk)  
Mike Pearson, Chair of the Regional Procurement Committee, [mpearson@dsfire.gov.uk](mailto:mpearson@dsfire.gov.uk)

*Further information*

Melanie Walsh, Regional Procurement Manager  
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### **Collaboration with educational packages for South West FRSs**

Teaching youngsters about fire and road safety can mean they will have potentially life-saving information at their fingertips. Although fire and rescue services often work with their local schools to share this valuable information, research in the South West indicated that the content and methods used at various key stages varied widely across the region.

This finding was not unexpected, as the guidance document, *Strategy for Children and Young People 2006-2010*, was only issued by CLG in October 2006. It encouraged neighbouring FRSs to discuss their methods of working in schools, colleges and other youth forums.

The South West has long recognised the importance of working with young people, reflected in the establishment of a Children and Young Persons working group by CFOA South West in 2003, under the chairmanship of the ACFO of Cornwall. The group is regarded as unique among CFOA regional groups, and offers advice and evidence to the LFB for "The fire and rescue service, working with children and young people, June 2008."

Following on from the finding, the South West FRSs have set themselves the challenge of producing a schools education package for Key Stages 1,2 and 3. This will take the format of a programme of lessons, replicated across the age ranges and delivered as appropriate for each age grouping. The common themes they will follow are:

- Fire prevention in the home
- Detection of and escape from fire
- Firesetting
- Calling 999
- Road Safety

Dorset FRS has produced three education resource packs for the foundation stage and Key Stages 1 & 2. Gloucestershire FRS has undertaken to produce

the Key Stage 3 pack. A secondary PSHE teacher has been seconded to the project to ensure curriculum integrity. The above overarching themes (with the exception of road safety) will be revisited throughout the key stages and key messages will be reinforced in each key stage using a “drip drip” approach. All lessons clearly identify National Curriculum and Healthy Schools’ links, as well as Every Child Matters outcomes. There will be opportunities offered within the pack to invite the FRS teams into schools.

The South West FRSs will benefit from this approach by having robust packages satisfying individual leads. Two FRSs have met the costs of producing these community safety education tools and are happy for them to be “badged” as appropriate. The project also encourages wider benefits to the FRSs from working together regionally.

*Further information*

Dave Norman MBE (Gloucestershire FRS Children and Young Peoples Manager)

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### **Contingency planning for disruption to service delivery arrangements**

The introduction of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 has placed a duty on each fire and rescue service to have in place effective business continuity arrangements. Similarly the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 also places a duty on fire authorities to make provision for dealing with emergency incidents. Where there has, in the past, been disruption around the provision of firefighting and special service arrangements, mainly due to industrial action, we have relied on the armed forces. This will not be the case in the future and clearly it is the intention of the government that each fire authority has in place local contingencies.

The environment within which we operate is constantly changing. The continuing threat of terrorism remains high in all our planning assumptions along with other potential disruption such as pandemic influenza, which could reduce significantly the availability of operational staff.

As a consequence, a project was developed between CFOA and FiReBuy, which involved 33 fire and rescue authorities, including most of the South West. The project ‘Fireguard’ explored whether an external provider would be able to support basic emergency cover during periods of business interruption. Significant progress has been made over the past 18 months, due in no small part to the efforts of the liaison officers representing each FRS. The procurement process selected a preferred bidder and associated costs. However, despite the best efforts of those involved, it has been generally accepted that the outcome was too expensive. The Programme Board met in October and decided to close the project, although there will be some consideration towards an alternative model by the liaison officers for a meeting scheduled for later this month.

In response, the SW CFOA Operations and Resilience Workstream is now developing a number of alternatives for a regional solution. Bob Hark, Dorset FRS, is heading up this work through a task-and-finish group to consider options for a regional, sub-regional or local framework.

One option, for example, could be to develop a South West regional agreement for mutual assistance which bridges the gap between the existing Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, Section 13 and 16 reinforcement schemes and the National Mutual Aid agreement. This may enable fire and rescue services to support each other under a formal agreement and a common concept of operations in the event of local shortages of operational staff. Obviously, to support such a scheme, each South West FRS would need to make local arrangements to ensure the supply of fire crews. There are other alternatives and variations that are currently being considered.

Finally the potential benefits from this collaborative approach are:

- Minimal cost in comparison to the Fireguard solution;
- The potential to consider innovative staff solutions and the sharing of emergency fire crews leading to greater resilience and the deployment of safer, more effective and better trained operational staff; and
- Reduced project cost/resources through collaborative working.

*Further information*

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Jim Onions - [jim.onions@glosfire.gov.uk](mailto:jim.onions@glosfire.gov.uk)

### **Meet the regional Human Resources team**

The regional HR team now consists of David Gerard and Kate Mackay, who are both based in the regional control centre in Taunton. Both David and Kate are relatively new to their regional roles, but between them bring a wealth of experience which will enable us to move forward the regional HRMD agenda.

David came most recently from Gloucestershire FRS, having previously worked for the police and Royal Mail. He is currently focusing on working on the regional HR strategy and his priorities for the coming year (more to follow in the next issue), along with providing HR support and advice to South West Fire Control and the project in the region.

Kate has had a wide range of HR project/programme experience in her previous roles at BT and as an HR consultant at Hewitt Associates. She brings both wide ranging knowledge of external practice and experience of project discipline to the fire and rescue service, which should help us to focus on both identifying and realising regional benefits in the future. Her role includes significant co-ordination and collation of information from across the

region and she can regularly be found cajoling people in each FRS to provide their views and information.

The challenge for David and Kate is to meet the needs of both the national agenda while meeting local FRS needs and priorities, and not placing an additional burden on local HR or operational staff. We are delighted to have such a strong team in place to build on our early successes in the HRMD workstream.

#### *Further information*

Kate Mackay – [kmackay@dsfire.gov.uk](mailto:kmackay@dsfire.gov.uk)

David Gerard – [david.gerard@glosefire.gov.uk](mailto:david.gerard@glosefire.gov.uk)

### **First impressions of the Incident Reporting System (IRS)**

Avon FRS (AF&RS) launched the IRS on 1 October 2008. The implementation project was managed by Simon Flood, Performance Improvement Manager. There were three main elements to the implementation.

#### **Technical infrastructure**

At AF&RS we chose to use CLG's IRS data input system rather than develop our own. The advantages this brought were that we avoided the cost of developing our own system. AF&RS uses Fortek's Vision command and control system. Fortek developed products to populate IRS with incidents attended and to import 'Recorded' incidents back to the Vision database. We were able to be confident in these products as they had previously been used in IRS implementation by Warwick and Merseyside FRSs.

#### **Training**

Every appliance manager received training in the workplace during September 2008. Training sessions lasted between one and two hours and were scheduled to cause minimum disruption to operational crews. A team of three delivered the training, meaning that on some days each trainer delivered three training sessions. At AF&RS we had an advantage in that we had used electronic incident recording systems for a number of years, meaning that our appliance managers all had at least some computer literacy. Post training, each appliance manager was required to complete at least three incidents on the training database and to report back using an online training evaluation form. Almost 99 percent of trainees expressed satisfaction with the training and considered themselves confident in using IRS. Further training was provided upon request.

#### **Data management**

Data collected at incidents using IRS is stored in new data tables, meaning that the majority of our reports and queries needed to be rewritten to read from the new tables. This created a considerable amount of work for our

performance team. We are working on converting our pre-IRS incidents to the IRS data format so we will be able to incident report from a single source. There were also issues and costs associated with reconfiguring our Signals from Noise analytical software to read from the new data source.

### **Post-implementation**

AF&RS has now been using IRS for three months. So far over 2,300 incidents have been recorded using IRS. Appliance managers have found IRS easy to use and a big improvement on our previous electronic systems. The main problems have been system down time, where we have lost two-and-a-half days so far and a further two days were lost at the end of December in preparation for those FRSs who were going live on 1 January. Although we are, on the whole, pleased with IRS, we have also submitted many suggestions for improvement to the IRS helpdesk. A review of IRS is promised early in the new financial year, once all FRSs are live.

There are some issues with the recording of data that we are investigating. Under IRS it appears that more incidents are recorded as 'primary' than before. AF&RS has joined the 'live IRS' group of FRSs and, through this group, has found that this is a common problem. We are busy 'quality assuring' the recording incidents, correcting where appropriate and feeding back to our appliance managers individual and common problems. We have been pleased to offer guidance and support about our implementation experience to other FRSs and have South Wales and Cornwall visiting in the next few weeks.

*Further information*

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