

**TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**

**Item No 5**

**MEETING: POLICY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE 13 SEPTEMBER 2010**

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**SUBJECT: REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARDS AND THE EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY AGENDA**

**REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER**

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**1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This paper informs the Committee of changes in respect of the coalition government's approach to two key areas of work contained within the Fire and Rescue National Framework Document, namely Regional Management Boards and the Equality and Diversity agenda, and requests that the Committee consider its position with regard to these two matters.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Members will recall that, in July 2004, the first National Framework for the Fire and Rescue Service was published by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). This document set out the expectations of government in respect of the Fire and Rescue Service and included several specific areas of work. Two of these areas covered the role and function of Regional Management Boards and the establishment of Equality and diversity targets and monitoring systems.
- 2.2 The new fire minister, Bob Neill MP, at an event held in London on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2010, has set out how the new government will be approaching the National Framework document in the near future with particular emphasis on these two areas. The key changes are highlighted below for the attention of Members.

**3 REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARDS**

- 3.1 There will no longer be a requirement for Fire and Rescue Authorities to work through Regional Management Boards (RMB) to deliver the various elements of the National Framework that fell within the RMB remit.
- 3.2 In essence the continuation of the RMBs is now a decision for the constituent Fire and Rescue Authorities, although there will still be a government expectation that Authorities will collaborate where it is beneficial to do so.
- 3.3 In this regard, it should be noted that, since its inception, the RMB in the North East has provided a vehicle for discussion and for the delivery of some collaborative projects, such as the provision of fire appliances and uniform, and it continues to be a useful forum for discussing issues surrounding the FireControl project.

- 3.4 However, the RMB is not a statutory decision making body, therefore its formal structure and terms of reference could be considered to be overly complicated given its lack of formal authority and that a more informal means of discussing issues of common interest may be more appropriate for the region.
- 3.5 Furthermore, recent issues within the RMB itself would also suggest that it is now appropriate to review the future of the Board. However, regardless of what this Authority determines as to the future of the Regional Management Board (RMB), consultation will need to be undertaken with colleagues from the Fire and Rescue Services of the North East in order to ascertain their views as to whether the RMB should continue or whether there are other, more effective methods of collaborating.

### **4 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY MONITORING**

- 4.1 In respect of the Equality and Diversity requirements contained within the National Framework document, the Minister has stated that CLG will no longer monitor Fire and Rescue Authority compliance within the Equality and Diversity Strategy, nor will the department look to monitor or enforce the recruitment, progression or retention targets that currently exist in individual services.
- 4.2 Instead the onus will be on individual Fire and Rescue Authorities to determine how they will pursue the Equality and Diversity agenda and subsequently decide whether to retain a target-based approach in line with a performance management framework.
- 4.3 Given the importance of this issue, highlighted by the emphasis that this Authority has placed on the subject of equality and diversity in recent years, it is suggested that the Committee consider retaining the performance measures in place and that performance against these continue to be reported to the Authority, regardless of the fact that there will no longer be a requirement to report the information to CLG.
- 4.4 This will ensure that the subject continues to be seen by everyone as a key priority of the Authority and, in practical terms, the targets will help to focus attention on the need to continue developing and implementing initiatives that will help to broaden the diversity of the workforce.

### **5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no financial implications in respect of this specific report.

### **6 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Maintaining the commitment to the Equality and Diversity agenda will highlight to all concerned that the Authority is determined to achieve a workforce that reflects the local population.

**7 RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Consider the content of the above report and comment accordingly.
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**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers refer to the subject matter of the above:

- Letter from Fire Minister Bob Neill MP, July 2010