

North East Fire & Rescue Services: Partnership Champions

Within our region, Fire and Rescue Services (FRSs) are an integral part of the North East Improvement and Efficiency Partnership (RIEP). There are four FRSs in our region:

- County Durham & Darlington Fire & Rescue Service (CDDFRS)
- Cleveland Fire Brigade (CFRS)
- Northumberland Fire & Rescue Service (NFRS)
- Tyne & Wear Fire & Rescue Service (TWFRS)

All four are core members of the partnership and have an active involvement in nearly all RIEP programmes. The RIEP has also benefitted from the free use of FRS venues for courses and seminars (thanks especially to TWFRS).

The strong relationship comes as no surprise given the strong ethos of partnership working in the North East, but the real good news story is that the RIEP/FRS relationship is being hailed as the 'best in the country'...

The RIEP perspective...

'The FRSs are highly valued and effective contributors. This contrasts markedly from several other RIEPs that have created a separate workstream solely for FRS's. At a recent national meeting of the RIEPs an officer from the Chief Fire Officer Association commented that the North East approach was recognised as best practice by his organisation.'

Martin Ryan, Director, [North East Improvement & Efficiency Partnership](#)

The FRS perspective...

'Sector-led improvement' has become the mantra for the Fire & Rescue Service since the publication of the Audit Commission's national report on the Service – Rising to the Challenge. The Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership provides support through innovative, tailored programmes to help us drive our own improvement. It is an excellent vehicle to develop collaborative approaches, deliver economies of scale, access best practice from our local authority partners and focus on common challenges and opportunities. I am delighted that so many FRS colleagues are engaging in the programme boards and in the design and commissioning of projects. FRS engagement in the RIEP is promoted as being the best in the country and I am sure that as a sector we will reap the benefits as a result. '

Susan Johnson, Chief Executive, [County Durham & Darlington FRS](#), and Chair of the RIEP's [Organisational Development & Workforce Planning Programme](#).

Some of the RIEP Programmes & Projects that the FRSs are involved in include:

Climate Change

The RIEP has assisted three FRSs including the regional control centre to access the Carbon Trust's Carbon Management Programme. Staff from the FRSs are represented on the Climate Change Best Practice Project board and participate in the regional practitioners group. The FRSs have also expressed an interest in being involved in a project which will test a new suite of Fleet Key Performance Indicators developed by the RIEP around the most efficient use of local authority service vehicles.

Organisational Development & Workforce Planning (OD&WP) Programme

All FRS's have made a commitment to carry out a Business Process Improvement (BPI) audit as part of the OD & WP Programme. The audits are being carried out this summer and will give authorities the chance to examine all of their business process activity and to map any 'lean' processes. BPI is seen by central government as a key tool for driving efficiencies, and increasing the use of BPI was a central objective of the National Improvement & Efficiency Strategy.

Collaborative Procurement (CP) Programme

Three out of the 4 FRSs are involved in governance and steering of the CP programme which aims to help local authorities make significant cashable efficiency savings in their procurement processes.

- There is **CDDFRS** representation on the CP Board who feeds back to the **FRS regional procurement board**
 - There is **CDDFRS** representation on the Demand & Supply Side Intelligence project board
 - A nomination from **Tyne & Wear FRS** is currently awaited for the Policy & Practice project board
 - A nomination from **Cleveland FRS** is awaited for the Capacity Management & Mobilisation project board
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Community Engagement & Empowerment (CEE) Programme

The CEE programme recently launched a £300,000 Innovation Fund to support projects with a genuine community engagement slant. We have had several bids from FRSs including:

Social Marketing Engagement Delivery Toolkit

A bid was submitted by **CDDFRS** to develop a bespoke Regional Fire and Rescue Service Social Marketing Engagement Delivery Toolkit, designed using in-depth analysis and research techniques such as customer behaviour profiling and focus groups.

This will help the FRSs to improve and enhance regional knowledge and understanding of why people behave the way they do, and prevent the increasing number of dwelling fire deaths and associated injuries which occur more frequently in the North East than anywhere else.

Bids are being considered by the CEE Board later in the summer and we will report back on the successful bids in future Bulletins.

Regional NI4 survey methodology to be used in National FRS work

Earlier in the year, the CEE Programme commissioned an e survey asking a range of partners about their perceptions of National Indicator 4 (the percentage of people who feel they can influence local decision making). **CDDFRS** is using the methodology in a similar project to be carried out at a national level.

In more detail.....Regional Flood Rescue & Damage Prevention Provision

Following the findings from the review by Sir Michael Pitt into the response and impact of the floods in Summer 2007, the FRSs are working together to improve the capacity of the national and regional FRS's to deal with flood response and rescue.

Chief FRS Officers in the region applied for national **CLG Efficiency and Innovation Funding** (handled by the RIEP in this region). The funding presented a unique and timely opportunity to collaborate on enhancing the provision of flood rescue assets and training across the region. The bid was recently approved by the RIEP.

The impact of the summer 2007 floods has been estimated at a staggering £3 – 4 billion. The project will significantly improve resilience in the North East to deal with major flooding incidents and increase efficiencies through a collaborative approach to water rescue and flood damage prevention.

A regional flood rescue response module is being created that will deliver a self sufficient capability in the event of a major flood. A regional store of flood sacks and High Volume Pumps will be created which can be mass deployed into local authority areas by the Fire and Rescue Services. This should prevent water entering properties and causing significant amounts of damage and help minimise the stretch on public sector resources in the aftermath of a major flood incident.

There are currently two FRS water rescue teams established in the North East, in Tyne and Wear and County Durham and Darlington. Northumberland are preparing to introduce a third team. Approximately 140 'first responders' will be equipped to supplement these

teams. Mass Decontamination Units have been provided as part of the national Resilience Programme for FRSs.

The project provides an opportunity for all FRS's in the North East to combine resources and capability for the good of the community. If each FRS was to attempt to provide this capability independently the costs would be significant and the staffing requirement prohibitive.

Specific savings and efficiencies identified include:

- Efficiency saving of collaborative working **£250,000**
- Deployment costs of other FRS Resources **£60,000**
- Damage prevention cost avoidance **£5,000,000**

The project is the first 'regional module' approach to water rescue in the country and will serve as an example of good practice that will be shared throughout every region. Other regions have already expressed an interest in learning from the North East's experiences.

For more information, please contact riep@northeastcouncils.gov.uk
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