



Merseyside Brussels Office/ Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service Ideas for Joint Work 2005/06 and Beyond

1. Introduction

This document describes some of the main opportunities that exist at European level over the coming year for Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service and outlines how the Merseyside Brussels Office (MBO) can help in engaging with those opportunities.

This document follows discussion with the Community Fire Safety Team, and in particular officers working on partnership development, arson reduction and youth engagement, at a meeting on 13 July this year. We would, however, be very happy to receive any further ideas and input.

2. The Merseyside Brussels Office

The MBO represents the interests of Merseyside in the EU. Its members include Merseyside Fire and Rescue, the Merseyside local authorities and other public and voluntary-sector organisations from the city region. The MBO helps to ensure Merseyside engages fully with the funding, legislative and partnership opportunities the EU offers.

3. How the MBO has worked with Merseyside Fire and Rescue

Historically, the MBO has worked with Merseyside Fire and Rescue to increase recognition at EU level of the pioneering work that has been done in Merseyside on community fire safety. To this end, we have organized two visits to Brussels where Fire Authority members and Fire Service officers met with our North West MEPs and European Commission representatives. On one of these visits, we also organized meetings to explore EU funding opportunities and arranged a networking seminar with other fire sector representatives and regional representatives from across the EU.

The MBO has sent regular bulletins on EU community safety developments (including fire safety) to Merseyside Fire and Rescue. We have also invited the Service to our regular Strategic Board meetings (where a range of European issues are discussed, such as the future of Objective 1) and to our EU Social Inclusion Forum meetings (where EU social inclusion opportunities are discussed); both of these are held in Merseyside. This has been complemented by occasional *ad hoc* bilateral meetings with the Service in Merseyside. All of this ongoing contact has been through DCFO Mike Hagen's office.

4. Upcoming opportunities

At the meeting between the MBO and the Service on 13 July, it was felt that, while general awareness-raising at EU level of Merseyside's best practice remains a possibility for future work between the MBO and the Service, it would also be a good idea to engage better with the range of funds available from the EU for fire and rescue-related work and to follow more closely the relevant legislative proposals coming out of the EU.

While the EU has no direct competence for fire safety, it does legislate on and/or provide funds for the following areas of the Service's work: general employment issues, civil



protection and terrorism, standards, social inclusion and youth work, transport safety, regional funds (Objective 1), arson and crime reduction.

5. Funding

The MBO role here mainly concerns the trans-national EU funds, that is to say the thematic funds that are available direct from the European Commission and which have to be applied for in partnership with organizations from other parts of the EU. The individual grants available vary in size, but will usually fund a high proportion of project costs, with contributions in kind often accepted for the remainder. Bid consortia would typically consist of partners from three or more EU member states.

The trans-national funds are an opportunity to change cultures, further research and knowledge and build partnerships. Any projects supported would have to be trans-national in nature; examples could include:

- a conference to share good practice on a particular theme between Merseyside and other leading EU fire services;
- a pilot project in Merseyside to build on existing work or explore a new area of activity; the project could be local in nature but would be run in parallel with similar pilots elsewhere in Europe with results being shared;
- a project to address a trans-national problem, such as imports of fireworks or other explosives.

The MBO will provide the following assistance with funding bids:

- raising awareness within the Service of the funds available;
- finding EU funds to fit the Service's project ideas and advising on the appropriateness of bids;
- liaising with the Commission and other EU institutions on any technical questions;
- finding project partners in other EU member states through our extensive network of contacts in Brussels;
- keeping the Service informed of other regions' bids that it could join;
- mobilizing North West MEPs and UK government to support the Service's bids where appropriate;
- other tasks as identified.

AGIS

AGIS is the main EU trans-national fund for co-operation on fighting and preventing crime, providing €50,000 to €200,000 per project. The deadline for the next bidding round is likely to be mid-December.

The MBO and Merseyside Fire and Rescue will explore bids around: the anti-social behaviour volume side of arson; the supply of fireworks into the UK, particularly industrial-sized fireworks; youth work on arson reduction, perhaps including profiling and working with likely future offenders, courses, diversionary activities and restorative justice. The MBO will develop these ideas further with the Service in time for the next call for proposals in the autumn.

Public health fund



The Programme of Community Action in the Field of Public Health provides funds for health information, rapid reaction to health threats and health promotion through addressing health determinants.

The NHS in the North West has experience in applying for this fund and is interested in working with Merseyside Fire and Rescue on bids for preventative projects on fire-related accidents and deaths. They are particularly interested in work with excluded groups, such as building on Merseyside Fire and Rescue's current work with drug users to improve their fire safety. The MBO will explore this area over the summer in conjunction with the Service and the North West Health Brussels Office.

Transport safety funding

Under its Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Development (6FP), the EU has provided large and numerous grants for transport safety pilot projects, information campaigns and networks. 6FP runs for one more year; in December the Commission will issue a work programme outlining all the activities it intends to fund under the programme in 2006. Its successor programme, the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) is expected to fund similar transport safety activities, but the final detail of this fund has not yet been confirmed.

The MBO will keep Merseyside Fire and Rescue abreast of any funding opportunities that arise under the 6FP and 7FP that may help to develop the Service's transport safety work, such as its hard hitting information campaigns for young people.

ERF/INTI

The European Refugee Fund (ERF) and INTI provide funds for reception and integration of asylum seekers and economic migrants respectively. ERF is administered from the Home Office and does not require trans-national partners; INTI is administered by the European Commission. They typically provide €40,000 to €600,000 per project.

There may be possibilities here for funding a project to prevent immigrant-related arson or home fire safety work targeted around the particular needs (such as different cooking methods) or specific immigrant groups. The MBO will explore these further with the Service in time for the next calls for proposals.

Social and employment funds

The EU also provides trans-national funds on social inclusion, vocational training and equality in employment. These funds may be particularly promising in relation to the Service's community fire safety advocates scheme or for encouraging diversity in the Service's recruitment of staff. Essex is one UK fire service that has successfully used EU funds to meet some of its vocational training needs.

Nicola While, the MBO officer working on social inclusion and employment issues, is happy to meet with the Service to develop these ideas. She also runs a Merseyside-wide EU social inclusion forum that looks at precisely these funds and issues; the Service may wish to consider getting more involved in this forum.



Objective 1

The MBO is lobbying heavily in Brussels to ensure a decent EU regional funding package for Merseyside post-2006, when the Merseyside's current Objective 1 status runs out. It is working with other European regions in the same situation to ensure our voice is heard. Our members can keep abreast of this process and feed in their input via our Strategic Board.

6. Legislation

One of the main areas in which the EU legislates that is of relevance to fire and rescue services is civil protection. Some elements of the EU's agenda here over the coming years include:

- preparedness and response to natural and man-made disasters, including risk mapping and other activities on flooding;
- terrorism - cutting terrorists' finances and working with countries of origin of terrorists and terrorism;
- better information exchange on threats to security and good practice on civil protection;
- continuing the informal EU Civil Protection Forum, which brings together stakeholders to discuss the EU agenda in this area, exchange good practice and forge links – next meeting November this year;
- providing funds for civil protection and security projects through the EU Civil Protection Fund, the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development and a new fund for the victims of terrorist acts.

On employment, the EU is currently revising the Working Time Directive, with the European Parliament wanting to phase out the individual opt-out and have on-call time counted as working time. Other employment legislation covers equality in the workplace and health and safety.

The EU also legislates on a range of other relevant issues listed in section 4 of this document, above. The MBO will continue to brief the Service regularly on developments in these areas and respond to any resulting requests for information or lobbying.

8. Reporting structures

Initially the MBO had two main contacts within Merseyside Fire and Rescue to whom it sent its bulletins and other regular information. One of these contacts was interested mainly in EU policy issues and the other external funding. This structure worked reasonably well. We feel it would help if we returned to a situation where the MBO has a range of direct contacts within the Service.

The recent meeting held between the MBO and the Service was very useful in establishing new contacts on arson reduction, partnerships and youth engagement, and additional contacts were mooted. The MBO would appreciate receiving any suggestions for further contacts on the following areas of the EU agenda: general employment issues, civil protection and terrorism, standards, social inclusion, transport safety.

James Sharples, policy officer, The Merseyside Brussels Office, 18 July 2005