

Report No: RMB/6/05
Meeting Date: 26 January 2005
Agenda Item No: 10

REPORT TO THE SOUTH EAST FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICES REGIONAL MANAGEMENT BOARD

RMB "Sign-Off" documentation

KEY ISSUE/DECISION

To present standard templates to the RMB to enable the process of Work-Package control to be undertaken.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Board meetings held in Autumn 2004 came to a consensus that the projects would be ratified and formally approved by the Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) by means of a standard template designed for this purpose.

In the same vein, following the 21 October "Away-day", it was decided that a common template should also be made available to allow for "sign-off assurance" of consultation and policy transactions.

The relevant templates and associated process have now been developed, and are presented for acceptance by RMB.

CONSULTATION

Constituent members of the South East Fire and Rescue Services Regional Management Board

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the two templates and associated processes be accepted.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To comply with the decisions made by the Board to allow for comprehensive work package control and transaction assurance.

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Introduction

The work undertaken by RMB throughout 2004/2005 has resulted in the development of thirty-two candidate projects across six work streams, representing the evolution of the modernisation and collaboration programme for the South East.

These projects or Key Collaborative Areas (KCAs) form the basis of the Business Plan, and the portfolio of Regional activities to be driven forward over the next year.

The Board meetings held in Autumn 2004 came to a consensus that the projects would be ratified and formally approved by the Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) by means of a standard template designed for this purpose.

A relevant template and associated process have now been developed.

In the same vein, following the 21 October 2004 "Away-day", it was decided that a common template should also be made available to allow for "sign-off assurance" of consultation and policy transactions.

An example of this document is also presented for approval and acceptance by the Board.

Background

The decision has been made within the RMB, that all project work within the modernisation and collaboration programme should adhere to the principles of PRINCE2¹ project management.

The fundamental principles of controlling work within any stage of the programme, state that where work has been allocated to individuals or teams, matching confirmation should be provided showing that the work has been completed and accepted.

The sets of information are termed work packages, and in the case of the RMB programme these refer to the project profile documents produced by personnel within the individual work streams.

It is important that, in broad terms, work only commences and continues with the consent of the Project Manager, and in the case of the generic KCAs, the consent of the SRO.

It is for this reason that a template has been produced which will enable the constituent projects to be signed-off and ratified. (See Appendix A)

¹ PRINCE2-Projects IN Controlled Environments Version 2 (OGC)

Where, on occasion, the Chair of RMB is required to sign letters and other documents on behalf of the Board, this requires confirmation that suitable and sufficient consultation has taken place, and sign-off achieved within respective Fire and Rescue Authorities.

This could also include legal and financial considerations by respective Local Authority Officers.

It has also been suggested that, where appropriate, South East County Leaders and Chief Executives be brought within the consultation round after detailed impact assessments from Chief Fire Officers, Financial and Legal advisers have been completed.

The template produced is designed to enable an audit trail to be undertaken and documented. (See Appendix B)

Analysis and Commentary

Key Issues

1. Responsibility for, and control of projects.

The aim of introducing a system of programme management was to allow for greater control and a more detailed understanding of progress in the constituent work streams.

The constituent projects within the South East Programme are aligned within six work streams, such that each, under the accepted protocol, constitutes a work package:

"A Work Package is a set of information about one or more required products collated by the Project Manager to pass responsibility for work or delivery formally to a Team Manager or team member"

(PRINCE2 Manual page 363,section A.33)

The fundamental principle of this process is that prior to allocating a work package to a team, agreement should be reached with the project manager as to:

- What is to be delivered?
- What constraints apply?
- What interfaces exist?
- Are requirements reasonable and achievable?

A great deal of effort has taken place within the work streams such that consensus has been achieved between project directors and individual project managers.

The final stage is for the Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) to ratify their project portfolios and "sign off", effectively authorising the work to proceed.

The standard template shown at Appendix A has been designed for this purpose.

2. Consultation and Policy Transactions: Sign-Off Assurance.

There are occasions where a collective response to consultation, or a requirement for a determination for, or on behalf of the RMB may require additional control measures in order to provide a definitive and continuous audit trail.

The Chair of RMB, when required to sign letters and other documents, will require confirmation that suitable and sufficient consultation and sign-off has been achieved amongst key stakeholders within the respective Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) of the South East.

This could include financial and legal considerations by Local Authority Officers. Similarly it is suggested that, bearing in mind the different make-up of the respective FRAs, County Leaders and Chief Executives may need to be brought within the consultation round after detailed impact assessments from Chief Fire Officers, financial and legal advisers have been completed.

At present, there is no adopted process to ensure that all stakeholders have had the opportunity to consult, and similarly no record exists within the programme to indicate that the consultation has been completed.

In this instance, the Board could be criticised for not allowing stakeholders sufficient opportunity to contribute to what amounts to being Regional policy on matters that, hitherto, have been exclusively local responsibilities.

In the absence of suitable and sufficient consultation with financial, legal and operational specialist officers, the opportunity for technical challenges to proposals arising at inappropriately late stages is increased.

A template has been produced shown at Appendix B which can accompany each consultation return and ultimately signed-off by the nominated lead for the consultation process within the relevant FRA.

Options

1. Responsibility for, and control of projects.

a) Allow work streams to operate without formal sign-off and ratification with the potential for problems caused through ownership definition, duplication and governance.

b) Recommended: Accept the work-package control model, undertake project sign-off, and use the constituent template document for the purpose.

2. Consultation and Policy Transactions: Sign-Off Assurance.

a) Circulate documents for consultation without resort to an standardised audit trail, and risk the opportunity for technical challenges to proposals arising at inappropriately late stages.

b) Recommended: Accept the process whereby a template will accompany each consultation return.

Note: The template will be issued when consultation over a particular document, and/or decision is required.

Where appropriate this will be accompanied by a high-level Gantt chart² indicating date of issue, and deadline date of return.

Implications (of accepting recommended Option 1(a))

Perceived Positive:

- Allow for comprehensive sign-off process
- Support and simplify project development
- Create auditable process
- Comply with stated aims of RMB
- Indicate continued Programme development and engagement
- Ratify core work packages for 2005/06 RMB Business Plan

Perceived Negative:

- None apparent

Recommendations

That the Board accept Options 1(b) and 2(b):

1(b) Accept the work-package control model, undertake project sign-off, and use the constituent template document for the purpose.

2(b) Accept the process whereby a template will accompany each consultation return.

Conclusion

The RMB meetings held in Autumn 2004 came to a consensus that the projects would be ratified and formally approved by the Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) by means of a standard template designed for this purpose.

In the same vein, following the 21 October 2004 "Away-day", it was decided that a common template should also be made available to allow for "sign-off assurance" of consultation and policy transactions.

The respective templates and explanatory notes have now been completed and it is envisaged that the administrative process can now be enhanced.

Supporting bibliography

Managing Successful Projects with PRINCE2 (9th impression, OGC, 2004)
Microsoft Project 2000 version.

Managing Successful Programmes. (2nd edition, OGC, 2003)

² Gantt Chart is a graphical way to depict work over time

Supporting Appendices

Appendix A: Work Package Control Template (Document PM001, Revision B)

Appendix B: Consultation and Policy Transactions (Document PM007, Revision B)