

10. EU Funding Opportunity “EU Watersave”

Purpose of report

1. To inform the Authority of an offer of EU funding for Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to administer the UK's contribution to a pilot project in connection with EU water rescue standards.
2. To seek direction on whether the Authority wishes to accept the funding offer and initiate the necessary project work with UK and EU partners, or authorise funding to be transferred to another UK body.

Recommendations

The Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer and the Clerk recommend that:

- i) *The funding offer is accepted.*
- ii) *That the Chief Fire Officer, Treasurer and Clerk review the grant agreement to ensure that the arrangements put in place for delivery of the UK contribution, and the control measures to oversee delivery and protect the Authorities interests, are robust.*
- iii) *These control measures should include systems to update the Authority on the project's progress and outcomes.*

Background

3. Resolutions of the European Parliament and the Council Conclusions in 2008 identified a requirement to reinforce the Union's disaster response capacity in the field of water search and rescue. This led, amongst other things, to funding being provided for a major EU flood exercise, EU FloodEx 2009, which took place in the Netherlands in September 2009. As previously reported to the Authority, the Chief Fire Officer was asked to lead the UK's participation in the exercise and Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service administered the UK's contribution, receiving a grant of 104k Euros to cover all costs incurred.
4. An issue highlighted by the exercise was the current lack of consistent EU wide standards for flood/water rescue. This limits interoperability and the potential for mutual aid at a European level. The linkages between front-line responders and weather and flood forecasting specialists established in UK since 2007 was also identified as an area of best practice that currently had little focus at a European level. As a result, the EU Parliament has resurrected and approved a bid for funding for a pilot project that had previously been put forward by the Netherlands.
5. Colleagues from the Netherlands have primary responsibility for delivery of the pilot and have effectively commenced the project with the appointment of full time project staff. They have secured funding to support contributions from the UK and Czech Republic in completing this work.

6. The project will run until December 2011. The objectives are to:
 - (i) Set up a multinational water search and rescue module
 - (ii) Set up a European Scientific network of experts in the field of water search and rescue to explore common issues relating to flood response.
7. As a Pilot Project, this work will explore the potential for greater international sharing of knowledge and resources in flood rescue. If successful, the pilot would lead to a further, more substantial, funding bid to conduct the work necessary to turn the outcomes from the Pilot into substantive European standards and protocols. However, there is no obligation on any of the partner organisations to this Pilot to contribute or support the work beyond December 2011.
8. It has been recognised at an EU level that the UK has made a number of significant improvements in standards and systems for flood response. These have been developed over the past six years through the Chief Fire Officers Association with assistance from multi-agency partners on the UK Search and Rescue Operators Group. It is also recognised that current work in the UK through the Defra Flood Rescue National Enhancement Project is seeking to ensure these standards and systems might be improved and formalised at a national level. Given this experience, the UK has been asked to provide leadership of the international team working to develop a water search and rescue model at an EU level.
9. This project, like the response to FloodEx 2009, will involve input from a range of UK partner organisations from the Fire and Rescue Service and voluntary sector. However, as was also the case in FloodEx 09, for financial and administrative purposes a single body, known within the EU system as an “associated beneficiary” is required to take responsibility for administering the UK’s contribution in line with the conditions established in the Grant Agreement. As previous partners and acknowledged leaders in this field, Hereford & Worcester is currently named as the UK associated beneficiary. However, we are not yet committed to undertake this role and have until April 2010 to either accept it or authorise the EU to transfer the funding to another UK body.
10. As the main coordinating beneficiary, the Netherlands will be administering nearly 1.6m Euro to deliver the pilot. Should the Authority accept responsibility for administering the UK contribution to this project, they would become accountable for a specific grant of 180k Euros to cover project and administrative overheads, including initial research and production of EU standard operating procedures. However, the risk of claw back from the EU is significantly reduced by the accounting arrangements already agreed with the Netherlands. Under these arrangements the Netherlands will directly contract the majority of general project costs, such as travel, training, contracting with suppliers etc. The UK will submit quarterly accounts and updates against pre-agreed project outcomes to the Netherlands, again minimising exposure to organisational or financial risk.

11. In addition to general project costs and the specific grant for administration and management, there are a number of further optional grants available to partners. Examples include payments for the provision of rooms for meetings or staff and equipment to assist with training should an organisation wish to make these available.
12. It should be noted that all EU funding arrangements require a contribution toward overall project resource needs from those receiving a grant. The expected UK contribution to this project over two years is 134k Euros. As was the case in FloodEx 2009, this figure includes the total equivalent value of the contribution made by all UK stakeholders to the project, not a cashable contribution to be made by the administering organisation. Although the contribution is not a cashable, it is nevertheless vital that appropriate administrative and management arrangements are put in place to fully record and account for the contributions made by all UK partners and national working groups.
13. Should responsibility be accepted, the minimum contribution that would be expected of the Authority and Management Team is:

FRA - Maintain Oversight of project progress and deliverables by receiving an update report at each FRA meeting.

Time Commitment: 5 minutes at each FRA.

CFO/CEO and Chair of the Authority - invitation to attend four international conferences [all associated travel and subsistence costs to be met directly by EU].

Time Commitment: Attendance is entirely optional. Potentially up to four days commitment between June 2010 and December 2011.

Director of Finance – Overall responsibility for ensuring UK accounts are being maintained in a format required by the EU, and that quarterly statements are submitted on time.

Time Commitment: Half a day per quarter. [This assumes appropriate project accounting resource is provided within the project team.]

14. The Authority has a number of options to deliver the necessary project work either utilising existing or temporary staff, or a combination of the two. In either case, the full cost of the resources used will come from the funding made available by the EU.

Conclusion/Summary

15. As the human and financial risks posed by flooding are becoming more apparent to governments across the EU, it is inevitable that the systems and protocols used in emergency response will need to be improved and harmonised. It is an honour for the UK to be recognised as leaders in this work, and for Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service to be asked to administer the UK's contribution.

16. However, to avoid future cost burdens it is also in the self interest of the UK and Hereford & Worcester to ensure that new standards developed at a European level are compatible with those we have recently put in place at great expense. Failure to do so could mean that at some stage in the future we may be required to adopt entirely different standards, with the associated costs of retraining and reequipping.
17. Although there should be no “profit” element on receipt of EU grant funding, the specific UK grant covers the full cost of administering the project. It is entirely appropriate for an element of this funding to go toward the salary costs for any current staff that may be required to contribute a proportion of their time toward the project.

Corporate Considerations

18. A Business Impact Analysis form is attached at Appendix 1 to measure and address the proposals contained in this report. The form contains information on the potential resource implications, legal issues, strategic policy links, equality/ethical issues and risk management implications.

Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Business Impact Assessment Form

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