Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

10 December 2014

**Staff International Exchange Programme**

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

For further information about this report please contact John Redmond,

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1. Purpose of Report

This report brings to a formal close the Fire Authority’s ‘Staff International Exchange Programme’ and provides a summary overview of the Programme since its inception.

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|  | Recommendations  The Fire Authority are asked to note the contents of this report. |

1. Background

The Staff International Exchange Programme was established, with Fire Authority approval, in 2006 following the successful application for funds from the European Commission’s (EC) Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). Funds from the EC were secured for a number of years, resulting in the Programme being fully financed with no burden placed on the local taxpayer or the Authority’s budgets.

The Programme has enabled approximately 200 exchange placements to take place, with the involvement of elected Members and staff from all areas of the Service. The Programme has run for eight years, with the most recent exchange taking place this summer.

The specific objectives set by the EC for the LLP (Leonardo) were:[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Support participants in training to acquire and use knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market;
2. Improve quality and innovation;
3. Enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training and mobility.

It is believed that the Fire Authority and the Service have supported the EC in the fulfilment of these objectives.

1. International Exchanges

The Programme has supported staff / Member placements to fire and civil protection organisations, operating in the following countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Romania.

In addition, the Service has played host to visiting staff from Denmark, Germany, Portugal, Spain, Hungary and Poland. Perhaps most notably was the numerous two-way exchange visits with Falck (the Danish private provider of fire, rescue and medical services) and Lodz Fire Service from Poland. Falck firefighters were regularly seen crewing fire appliances in Shropshire and officers from Lodz played an active role in community fire safety initiatives targeted at Polish communities resident in the County.

1. Knowledge Sharing

From the very first exchange visit all teams of participants have been required to share their experiences with colleagues and other organisations. Internally this has resulted in presentations to the Service’s senior management team and externally presentations to national conferences / events.[[2]](#footnote-2) Experiences and learning from visits have also been published nationally[[3]](#footnote-3) and internationally.[[4]](#footnote-4) [[5]](#footnote-5) [[6]](#footnote-6)

The Programme has also been promoted to other organisations, with the Service mentoring several other fire and police services through the LLP application process. Additionally, the Service has extended the Programme to partners, sent joint teams from the Region’s fire and rescue services on overseas exchanges and also teamed up with students from Telford College of Arts and Technology.

Each participant has received an internationally recognised ‘Leopass’ qualification, recording their involvement, personal development and experiences gained.

1. Benefits

Benefits arising from the Programme can be measured in several ways.

Formally, the Programme was held up by the Audit Commission[[7]](#footnote-7) and other bodies[[8]](#footnote-8) [[9]](#footnote-9) on a number of occasions as representing best / notable practice. In 2008 the EC judged over 200 short-listed international projects from 27 European countries and awarded ‘Shropshire – Falck’ the Gold Award[[10]](#footnote-10) for best international project.

Informally, the benefits to both staff and elected Members have led to an increased understanding and mutual respect of various roles and responsibilities both within the Service and Authority. With each and every exchange visit comprising of Members and staff from differing departments / stations the Programme has promoted teamwork and joint analysis / debate of working practices in cultures and environments distinctly different to the UK. This has given participants the confidence to challenge convention within Shropshire and seek out new and innovative approaches to tackle issues facing the Service today.

1. Leaving a Legacy

The greatest legacy of the Programme is arguably each individual’s personal development through new and unique, life-changing experiences, gained by exposure to working and national cultures / practices distinctly different to those found in the UK.

For the Authority / Service the legacy left is a reputation that is now truly international and highly respected amongst its peers, both at home and abroad. The reputation and impression left by the Authority / Service is regularly commented upon by Ministers and Ambassadors.[[11]](#footnote-11) [[12]](#footnote-12) [[13]](#footnote-13)

For those countries visited (particularly in Eastern Europe in the latter stages of the Programme) the legacy is the transportation and donation of 20 fire appliances, uniform and equipment to needy communities. This is in addition to the countless orphanages, visited and supported by participants.[[14]](#footnote-14)

1. The Future

With LLP funding now almost exhausted, the Programme has been brought to a formal close. The humanitarian aid element has been transferred to a newly-formed and wholly independent charity, ‘Operation Sabre,’ with a board of trustees, made up of Members and serving and retired staff from the Service.

The opportunity exists, should the Authority / Service wish to do so, to re-engage with the LLP through the recently launched Erasmus+ Programme[[15]](#footnote-15) (which replaces the previously used Leonardo Programme).

1. Financial Implications

The Programme has been fully funded via a succession of LLP grants, with no cost to the Authority or local taxpayer. With the exception of one twenty-year-old, redundant emergency tender, gifted to the Programme by the Fire Authority, all donated and transported fire appliances and equipment have either been donated by lease companies or purchased through local sponsorship and donations (with around £40k having been raised).

The Programme has a remaining budget of around £5k, which has been transferred to the General Fund.

1. Legal Comment

The LLP was initiated as a result of EC Decision 1720/2006/EC of the

European Parliament on 15 November 2006 (OJ L 327, p.45).

The Local Government (Overseas Assistance) Act 1993 enables fire authorities to provide advice and assistance to bodies outside the United

Kingdom and the donation of assets, such as the Service’s redundant emergency tender, falls under this legislation.

1. Initial Impact Assessment

An Initial Impact Assessment has been completed previously.

1. Equality Impact Assessment

There are no equality or diversity implications arising from this report. An Equality Impact Assessment is not, therefore, required.

1. Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

1. Background Papers

Details/updates regarding the Programme have been reported to the Authority on several occasions and available via the Fire Authority’s website.

1. <http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/education_training_youth/general_framework/c11082_en.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [www.cfoa.org.uk/download/12616](http://www.cfoa.org.uk/download/12616) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.leonardo.org.uk/news.asp?section=000100010003&itemid=477> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <http://da.falck.com/OmFalck/Documents/Falck%20%C3%A5rsrapport%2008%20DK.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.straz.lodz.pl/page/287,leonardo-da-vinci---wymiana-doswiadczen-w-zakresie-funkcjonowania-systemow-wspomagania-dowodzenia-dysponowania-zasobami-ratowniczymi-i-lacznosci.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <http://www2.cmepius.si/files/cmepius/userfiles/publikacije/vzu/qimenkv.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://archive.audit-commission.gov.uk/auditcommission/sitecollectiondocuments/AnnualAuditLetters/2006/ShropshireandWrekinFireandRescueAuthority.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <http://www.leonardo.org.uk/casestudy.asp?section=000100010038&itemid=119> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://www.bapcojournal.com/news/archivestory.php/aid/1907/Fire_service_awards.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <http://www.leonardo.org.uk/news.asp?section=000100010003&itemid=151> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <http://www.mfa.gov.hu/kulkepviselet/uk/en/en_hirek/090925_tuzoltok.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <http://blogs.fco.gov.uk/martinharris/2012/10/25/the-fraternity-of-firefighters/> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <http://www.xpatloop.com/news/18887> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <http://www.shropshirestar.com/news/2013/06/17/shropshire-firefighters-tackle-romanian-poverty/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <http://erasmus-plus.ro/?gclid=CjwKEAiAtNujBRDMmoCN46aB8noSJAC7SYv76B-GsWYcimmD-ehzGxYS8zgV0TotTU0umGCfPR_JDRoCZyHw_wcB> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)