

Fire Control Room Project Update

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report provides a summary update regarding progress with the Fire Control project from both a national and local perspective.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to note progress made to date (both nationally and locally) to implement resilient control room functions.

3 Background

Members will be aware that, as a result of the cancellation of the Government-led 'FiReControl' project in 2011, all English fire and rescue authorities were awarded grant funding to support the delivery of local solutions and/or collaborative approaches to achieve resilient fire control functions. Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority, in collaboration with Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Fire Authority, has entered into a formal agreement to create a 'virtual' control room operated from two locations (Shrewsbury and Worcester).

4 National Update

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) has recently published an updated report, providing a high-level, national summary of the improvements being made by fire and rescue authorities to their control room services, the delivery timescales and the projected savings. The updated summary can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-control-room-services-scheme-summary-national-picture-of-fire-and-rescue-authority-improvement-plans-march-2013-update>.

See pages 25 and 26 for the update regarding Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority and Hereford and Worcester and Rescue Fire Authority.

The report identifies which fire and rescue authorities have entered into new partnership agreements to deliver their control room projects; and which are now forecasting different resilience benefits from those set out in the original project bids, while explaining how they will continue to provide increased resilience and specific improvements at a local level, thereby strengthening the building blocks of national resilience.

Although there has been some variation in roll-out and completion dates, DCLG's assessment reveals that no projects have changed to the extent that the benefits originally outlined by the Government will not be realised, with no project finishing beyond March 2015. The estimated project savings stand at £126 million, just £2 million less than that originally forecast.

5 Local Update

Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service (HWFRS) and Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) currently operate their own control rooms, call handling and mobilising systems. Both Services have procured similar mobilising systems from the same supplier, using the same systems integrator as a contractor to link all new and legacy elements within each respective Service.

The collaborative initiative between both Authorities / Services (managed via a Memorandum of Understanding) aims to align the two new systems and operating processes to create a single, common, 'virtual' system, which will be capable of being operated from control rooms located in both Worcester and Shrewsbury.

Regular and formalised meetings are now taking place between HWFRS and SFRS staff and suppliers to secure a resilient solution for the collective communities of the West Mercia area.

A candid review by both Services of progress towards full integration and alignment has led to a revision of the expected completion date, now adjusted to March 2015. This has been reported to DCLG, as is reflected in its report, referred to above.

6 Financial Implications

There are no additional financial implications associated with this report. The costs necessary to create a 'virtual' combined control room are funded via a Government grant, awarded in 2012 to each Fire Authority.

7 Legal Comment

The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 prescribes a statutory requirement¹ for Fire and Rescue Authorities to 'make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel' (Section 7 (2) (c), Section 8 (2) (c) and Section 9 (3) (c)).

8 Risk Monitoring

When writing this report officers have reviewed Brigade Order 3 Part 2 Risk Management Protocol and have determined that there are no risk implications associated with it, as it is merely an update on progress.

9 Equality Impact Assessment

An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has been completed previously.

10 Appendices

There are no appendices to this report.

11 Background Papers

The Fire Authority has received regular reports since 2010 regarding the Fire Control Project, all of which are available at:

<http://www.shropshirefire.gov.uk/managing-the-service/fra/meetings/Fire-and-Rescue-Authority>

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/part/2/crossheading/core-functions>