

## FiReControl Project Update

### Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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### 1 Purpose of Report

This report sets out a summary overview of the key issues and matters arising from the recent decision announced by the Coalition Government to cancel the FiReControl project. It is not an exhaustive report, as the repercussions from the announcement are currently being considered within several arenas of the fire sector.

### 2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the contents of this report;
- b) Task officers to compile a draft response to the consultation document on behalf of the Fire Authority and delegate authority to the Strategy and Resources Committee to consider and approve the response;
- c) Approve the decision of the Local Authority Controlled Company (LACC) to place the LACC into 'dormancy' and task the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair, to protect the Authority's interests during the process of moving to dormancy;
- d) Task officers to compile, on behalf of the Fire Authority, a draft formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Authority and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority, setting out arrangements to secure the formation of a shared resilient control room infrastructure with common operating, technological and procedural standards/practices operated from two remote locations;
- e) Delegate authority to the Strategy and Resources Committee to approve the MoU; and
- f) Receive at the next meeting of the Fire Authority a more detailed report concerning developments and financial implications arising from the cancellation of the FiReControl project.

### 3 Background

The national FiReControl project was instigated in 2004, with a directive via the Fire and Rescue Service National Framework,<sup>1</sup> that all Fire and Rescue Services would transfer control room functions to nine regional control centres by 2007.

With the project running over-budget and well beyond original timescales, the Coalition Government announced<sup>2</sup> on the 20 December 2010 its intention to cancel the project with immediate effect on the grounds that the appointed contractor Cassidian (formerly EADS Defence & Security) was unable to deliver on time, to cost and quality.

### 4 Fire and Rescue Control Services Consultation

With the FiReControl project now cancelled, and recognising that Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) have a statutory function<sup>3</sup> to deal with calls for assistance, Government have recently (13 January 2011) published a consultation document<sup>4</sup> on the future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England.

This document considers:

- The legacy assets from the FiReControl project and how they might best be used for the benefit of the taxpayer and the fire and rescue community
- The lessons learnt from the FiReControl project
- Whether the aims of the project – improving national resilience, efficiency and the technology available to the fire and rescue services – are still valid and how these might be achieved
- The principles for allocating any funding available.

The Government has been explicit in stating<sup>5</sup> that it believes the fire and rescue community is best placed to decide on the future of its control services and will not impose any solution.

It is recommended that officers be tasked to compile a draft response to the consultation document on behalf of the Fire Authority, with authority delegated to the Strategy and Resources Committee to consider and approve the response, as the consultation period ends on 8 April 2011 (prior to the next meeting of the full Authority).

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<sup>1</sup> See: ODPM The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2004/05 (p15) - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/128923.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> See: Fire and Rescue Service IMMEDIATE BULLETIN, Bulletin number: 2, 20 December 2010 - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/1803710.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> See: Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 - <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents>

<sup>4</sup> See: [www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fireandrescuecontrolservices](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fireandrescuecontrolservices).

<sup>5</sup> See: Fire and Rescue Service IMMEDIATE BULLETIN, Bulletin number: 3, 13 January 2011 - <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/1816022.pdf>

## **5 Impact upon West Midlands Regional Fire Control Local Authority Controlled Company (LACC)**

The Board of Directors of this region's LACC met recently to discuss the implications and options arising from the announcement to cancel the FiReControl project. The Board deliberated the options set out within Government's consultation document, and, in summary, agreed unanimously not to use this region's Regional Control Centre (RCC) and set the LACC into a state of 'dormancy.' This decision is, of course, subject to the full agreement of all five constituent fire and rescue authorities within the region.

Nationally (excluding London Fire Brigade), it is understood that only one region wishes to give consideration to the use of their RCC.

It is recommended that the Fire Authority approve the decision of the LACC and task the Chief Fire Officer, in consultation with the Chair, to protect the Authority's interests during the process of moving the LACC into a state of dormancy.

## **6 Impact Upon Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service**

The impact upon both the Service and Fire Authority is somewhat lessened when compared to many other fire and rescue services. In the main, this is down to the Fire Authority's having originally procured the Airwave service several years ago and, more recently, having had the prudence to replace the Service's aged and obsolete command and control system (the replacement system now being operational). Notwithstanding the latter, an expectation had been held that the FiReControl project would provide certain national assets to the Service, e.g. new station end equipment, during 2011. These assets will now have to be procured locally to achieve full functionality of the Service's command and control system. It is expected that the costs to address outstanding functionality issues, which were dependent upon the FiReControl project, will be met as part of the Government assistance stated within the consultation document.

## **7 Future Options**

The recently published consultation document sets out a range of scenarios and options for consideration by fire and rescue authorities. Officers have reviewed the scenarios and options presented and, following close dialogue with the Chair of the Fire Authority, together with the Chair and Chief Fire Officer of Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority/Service (HWFRA/S), it is proposed to extend existing areas of inter-service collaboration to include:

the formation of a shared resilient control room infrastructure with common operating, technological and procedural standards/practices operated from two remote locations.

This position is aligned to ‘Scenario 2’ – Common standards for resilience agreed nationally of the consultation document (pages 36/37 - see attached appendix).

It is recommended that officers be tasked to compile, on behalf of the Fire Authority, a draft formal Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the Authority and Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority, with authority delegated to the Strategy and Resources Committee to approve the MoU. This will set out requirements necessary to secure, as a minimum, the outcomes set out in ‘Scenario 2.’

This approach capitalises on the investment made to date by the Fire Authority, creates a wider range of collaborative opportunities with HWFRA/S (and potentially West Mercia Police) and still secures, to varying degrees, the Government’s policy objectives in respect of resilience, enhanced technology and efficiency.

## **8 Financial Implications**

At this early stage following the announcement to cancel the FiReControl project it is not possible to determine accurately the financial consequences of the Government’s decision. However, the previous investment decision to procure a replacement, albeit interim command and control system, negates the need for any additional major investment at this stage. The long-term financial consequences arising from the announcement and the proposal to collaborate with HWFRA/S will be brought to the Fire Authority at a later date.

The five-year budget, considered earlier in the agenda, is based on there being no additional costs, as officers believe that any necessary expenditure can be met from grant and existing revenue budgets for command and control.

## **9 Legal Comment**

Irrespective of the Government’s decision to cancel the FiReControl project, the statutory duty to manage calls for assistance in the event of fires and other emergencies still resides with fire and rescue authorities (as set out within the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 and the Fire and Rescue Services (Emergencies) (England) Order 2007). How this duty is exercised is a matter for the Authority.

The full legal implications of the cancellation of the FiReControl project will be addressed in future reports.

## 10 Equality Impact Assessment

Officers have considered the Service's Brigade Order on Equality Impact Assessments (Personnel 5 Part 2) and have determined that there are no discriminatory practices or differential impacts upon specific groups arising from this report. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

## 11 Appendix

Extract - The Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England (Consultation) (Pages 36/37)

## 12 Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.

Implications of all of the following have been considered and, where they are significant (i.e. marked with an asterisk), the implications are detailed within the report itself.

Business Continuity Planning	*	Member Involvement	*
Capacity	*	National Framework	*
Civil Contingencies Act		Operational Assurance	*
Efficiency Savings	*	Public Value	
Environmental		Retained	
Financial	*	Risk and Insurance	
Fire Control/Fire Link	*	Staff	*
Information Communications and Technology		Strategic Planning	*
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	
Legal	*		

**Extract - The Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England  
(Consultation) (Pages 36/37)**

**Scenario 2 – Common Standards for Resilience Agreed Nationally**

**Expected outcome**

This scenario establishes national standards for fire and rescue control resilience which could be developed and monitored by the sector (e.g. the Chief Fire Officers Association). These standards would be expressed in terms of outputs and the method for achieving compliance would be for individual fire and rescue authorities to decide. Scenario 2 includes the installation of Firelink into existing control rooms but the development of common standards could be introduced alongside any of the other three scenarios. Some fire and rescue authorities may decide that meeting the standards for resilience could be achieved most effectively through sharing control services with another authority or agency, whilst others may decide that retaining a dedicated standalone control with improved interoperability arrangements would be sufficient. For some fire and rescue authorities – those with few requirements to mobilise to wide area incidents, and that already have modern IT infrastructure and adequate back-up arrangements – little change may be required to comply with the standards.

**Support provided by the Department**

The Department would provide financial support for the development of the resilience standards, with the technical and operational elements being led by the sector. In addition, the Department would provide endorsement of strategic decisions relating to the national interest.

**Resilience**

The introduction of standards would increase national resilience by providing a common interpretation of the statutory obligations placed upon fire and rescue authorities in respect of their control and mobilisation function.

Under this scenario common standards for resilience would underpin future working practices and ensure that all fire and rescue authorities were capable of providing, even during busy periods, an effective call handling and mobilisation service both to the public and to each other. The sector would need to consider what arrangements should be put in place to provide authorities with mutual assurance that the standards were being met.

### **Control room technology and value for the taxpayer**

The degree to which enhanced technology and efficiencies are achieved would depend upon the approach taken by fire and rescue authorities to meet the resilience standards. The need to meet the standards should lead some authorities to take decisions that would improve both efficiency and technical functionality.

### **Use of FiReControl legacy assets and infrastructure**

Fire and rescue authorities choosing to take on FiReControl legacy assets, such as the control centre buildings, could expect to improve the resilience of their control services as a result. This would help them to meet the new standards.