

FiReControl and FireLink Update

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

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1 Purpose of Report

This report updates Members on current activity surrounding the national FiReControl and FireLink projects.

2 Recommendations

The Fire Authority is asked to:

- a) Note the contents of this report;
- b) Task officers with ensuring that any additional costs for running the Regional Control Centre (RCC) do not impact on the tax payers of Shropshire (paragraph 4.4); and
- c) Task the Chief Fire Officer (CFO) with pressing Communities and Local Government (CLG) for further information on funding arrangements for replacement of the RCC mobilising system in eight years time (paragraph 4.6).

3 Background

Members will be aware of the two major national projects FireLink, concerned with providing a national digital radio system for the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), and FiReControl which will provide nine regional control and mobilising centres, controlled by Local Authority Controlled Companies (LACCs).

Recently the CLG published both parts of the full business case for the FiReControl project. Members received a copy of the Executive Summary at the last Fire Authority meeting in December 2008. This paper discusses the key issues raised in the business case and Members are asked to agree the comments as part of our regional response to the documents.

FireLink is currently on schedule and this paper sets out key timeframes and in addition provides Members with an update on how the project is ensuring that we maintain our excellent digital radio solution throughout the migration process.

4 The FiReControl Business Case

Members can access the full business case, published in November 2008 on:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fcbusinesscasepart2>

- 4.1** Officers are concerned that the list of 'key opportunities' in the report (pages 15 and 16) suggest that firefighters safety will be greatly improved by the solution set out in the business case. Clearly Members of this Fire Authority invested many years ago in a system almost identical to that provided within the FiReControl and FireLink projects so any replacement system will only provide a replica of our current safe systems of work. For example, we do not believe that the new system will provide better information to the fireground as our firefighters already have all of the information proposed in the project.
- 4.2** The business case sets out briefly how so called 'group services' are to be delivered. These are services such as IT Support, Human Resources, and Security etc. The document, however, does not clarify how they will be accountable, financially or otherwise, to stakeholders.
- 4.3** The business case clearly sets out that the project is part of the Fire and Resilience programme and as such the FiReControl project is part of the Critical National Infrastructure (CNI). Officers believe that this decision is an additional burden and as such the cost should be borne by central government. At present the government has added £710,000 per annum to the budget for the running of our RCC as a 'resilience payment' and have indicated informally that although this will be reviewed in 3 years time, local taxpayers will not be required to fund this part of the extra costs. However, no such guarantee has been given for other costs now causing officers concern.
- 4.4** Staffing levels are clearly a major part of the costs of running a control centre. CLG calculated likely staffing numbers as part of the business case. However, the Director of the RCC determined that he could not run the centre with the indicative staff numbers so these have already been increased. Members will recall that decisions on increased staffing levels (from 70 staff estimated by CLG to 82 required by the RCC Director) resulting in 'operationalising' CLG figures adds a further £350,000 to the annual running cost of the RCC and that your Director on the Board made clear that until the full costs of running the RCC were made clear, this Authority could not fully sign up to these increased staffing levels.

It is worrying therefore that the RCC Director is now estimating a further increase in management and training costs. Bearing in mind that the Fire Authority will bear 8.44% of any additional costs, Members will wish the Director of the RCC and the CFO to further press CLG to cover costs that derive from the resilience requirements of the RCC.

- 4.5 In the business case, CLG state that the savings from the FiReControl project can be used to deliver the priorities of the FRS notably the protection of vulnerable communities from fire. As there are no such savings in the West Midlands region the savings are not available for this investment. This is not true across the country where other more fortunate services will be able to invest savings for the benefit of their communities. Officers believe that this is unequal and will result in the prevention investment being untargeted and thus disappointing.
- 4.6 Officers are concerned that there is no co-terminosity between the lease for the building (20 years) and the provisions of the ICT contract. Additionally officers are concerned that CLG have not given commitment to fund a replacement mobilising system in eight years time. Members will wish the CFO to push for such a commitment or a clear estimate of the cost of a replacement system, either locally or regionally, before they sign any contract for taking over the lease.

5 Other FiReControl issues

- 5.1 Members will be pleased to hear that a recent audit of our preparation for cut over to the RCC (a so called Gateway) identified three areas of best practise and no recommendations for improvement.
- 5.2 The CFO and other Executive Officers recently accompanied the Chair of the Fire Authority at a formal meeting with the line-managers from our own existing Fire Control. Many issues were raised, particularly with regard to Human Resource (HR) issues and, as would be expected, our staff in fire control are concerned about their future. The Assistant Chief Officer (ACO) is working at national and regional level to obtain answers to many of the concerns of our staff. Members will wish to urge the CFO to work for regional agreement on HR issues as soon as possible in order that our staff continue to feel valued during this difficult time for them.
- 5.3 The RCC Director is now putting forward proposals for the structure of the company and is suggesting increases to the management and training staff employed. This proposed structure will be larger and more costly than that proposed by CLG. Any extra costs will place a burden on local taxpayers and as such Members are asked if they would wish to pay such extra costs or refer the Director to the CLG to argue for any additional staffing costs to be paid for through new burdens funding.

6 FireLink update

- 6.1 Officers are still in discussion with both FireLink and Airwave to ensure that during cut over to the new national radio system our firefighters do not have a reduction in the service currently available to them.
- 6.2 Planning is ongoing to ensure an efficient and effective change out of equipment during early summer this year.

7 Financial Implications

As reported at the April 2008 meeting there will be no savings from the FiReControl project. Therefore, any additional costs of running the RCC will need to be met by local tax payers.

8 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

9 Equality Impact Assessment

This report is purely an information item and thus has no immediate equality or diversity implications. An Initial Equality Impact Assessment has not, therefore, been completed.

10 Appendices

There are no appendices attached to this report.

11 Background Papers

Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority

- 30 April 2008, Minutes of meeting
- 11 June 2008, Minutes of meeting
- 16 July 2008, Minutes of meeting

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.

Balanced Score Card		Integrated Risk Management Planning	
Business Continuity Planning		Legal	*
Capacity		Member Involvement	
Civil Contingencies Act		National Framework	
Comprehensive Performance Assessment		Operational Assurance	
Efficiency Savings		Retained	
Environmental		Risk and Insurance	
Financial	*	Staff	*
Fire Control/Fire Link	*	Strategic Planning	
Information Communications and Technology		West Midlands Regional Management Board	
Freedom of Information / Data Protection / Environmental Information		Equality Impact Assessment	*