



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE
Fire & Rescue Service
Creating Safer Communities

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham
Fire and Rescue Authority

FUTURE FIRE CONTROL SERVICES

Report of the Chief Fire Officer

Agenda No:

Date: 16 September 2011

Purpose of Report:

To present to the Fire Authority a recommendation for submitting a bid to the Future Fire Control Services Scheme.

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 As the Fire Authority will be aware from previous reports (25th February 2011 and 24 June 2011), the project to deliver a Regional Control Centre solution was terminated by the Minister in December 2010. This left Nottinghamshire Fire & Rescue with many implications regarding the reliability and resilience of its existing systems.
- 1.2 An outline paper of the options available to the Service was presented at the meeting of 24 June 2011 where the Fire Authority agreed to task the Chief Fire Officer with providing detailed business case options in respect of:
- Option 2 – invest in a stand-alone upgrade of the current system or invest in a new mobilising system;
- Option 3 – go into partnership with other fire and rescue authorities.
- 1.3 Although no time-frame was set specifically, it was intended to report back as early as possible to allow the Fire Authority to assess the full resilience, financial and operational implications of the options considered.
- 1.4 Within one week of the Fire Authority meeting, however, two specific documents and, subsequently, ministerial guidance on the “Future Fire Control Services Scheme” were published which immediately had a direct impact on the paper previously considered by the Fire Authority. This report details for Members the publication of the reports and the content of the “Future Fire Control Services Scheme”.

2. REPORT

- 2.1 On 1 July 2011 the National Audit Office published their report into the failure of the Fire Control project (Appendix A). The overarching items were that the Fire Control project had been “flawed from the outset because it did not have support”, CLG “underestimated the project’s complexity and costs” and CLG had “failed to provide the necessary leadership and management to make the project successful”.
- 2.2 The report then went on to make three sets of recommendations on:
- reducing further waste from Fire Control;
 - holding contractors to account and terminating projects; and
 - tackling large-scale ICT enabled change projects in the future.
- 2.3 Of significant note to the Fire Authority were the specific recommendations regarding the reduction of further waste from the Fire Control project. The NAO report, recognising that CLG had yet to establish how it was going to achieve the original project objectives of resilience and efficiency, made the

recommendation that it should be managed as a “new programme with clear objectives”. Importantly CLG should:

- work closely with local FRS’s to encourage them to use existing control centres;
- identify effective levers to encourage FRS’s to work together;
- consider how the required level of assurance on sub-national interoperability can be met without imposition;
- review whether local arrangements provide sufficient certainty of response and deployment of resources on a local, regional and national level; and
- ensure there is a clear process for measuring outcomes, evaluating performance and demonstrating value for money through local delivery.

2.4 The response from CLG was prompt and on 5 July 2011 they published the findings into the consultation on the future of Fire Control Services in England (Appendix B), with the Minister issuing a Ministerial Statement (Appendix C), writing to all Chief Fire Officer’s and Chair’s informing them of the Future Fire Control Services Scheme (Appendix D) and issuing guidance to Fire Authorities seeking central support for improving the resilience and efficiency of their Control Service (Appendix E). All of this has a significant impact on the Fire Authority’s original decision of 24 June 2011 as new timelines were introduced and the potential for additional funding was revealed.

2.5 In summary of the detail in relation to 2.4 (above) the consultation response had obtained a broad consensus on a number of points, although some divergence existed on how some future objectives could be achieved. The report recognised that the removal of a Government imposed solution was welcomed but the improved resilience, enhanced technology and increased efficiency were still considered as important as when the RCC project was first conceived. Increased collaboration, determined locally, with some Government support received an 84% support rate.

2.6 Most importantly, Fire & Rescue Authorities emphasised that they needed rapid clarity from the Government on funding available and how it would be allocated so that they could progress with their plans.

2.7 In response to this, the Minister’s statement (Appendix C) confirmed that the Government was “making available up to £1.8 million for each Authority” and that plans, which will be assessed for value for money and resilience improvements, must be submitted by 4 November 2011.

2.8 The Minister’s announcement was confirmed in writing to both the Chief Fire Officer and Chair (Appendix D) and was supported by the guidance to Fire and Rescue Authorities intending to request funding to improve resilience, efficiency and security in their call-handling and mobilisation service and increase collaboration between their service and others. The guidance (Appendix E) was also supported by a Resilience and Efficiency Grant Q&A as well as a template which CLG require submissions to be made and a series of expected outcomes intended to support FRSs.

- 2.9 As an outcome of the Fire Authority's decision made at the meeting of 24 June 2011, work had already commenced with regard to collating information regarding the future business case options. Key to this had been a meeting between the Chief Fire Officer's within the region to look at the impact of collaboration. With the announcement made to the Minister, it was important that some collective steer was obtained across the services so that the issue of collaboration, as identified in the bidding template, could be addressed. As a consequence, Councillor Peter Roffey (Leicestershire) tabled an agenda item at the East Midland's Fire Forum meeting of 8 July 2011.
- 2.10 Members will recall the report to the Fire Authority on 25 February 2011 where it was agreed to engage with a Regional Forum following the dissolution of the Regional Management Board and the re-adoption of the delegated functions. The Forum, which constitutes Chief Fire Officers, Chairs and portfolio holders, considered within the East Midland's region had begun meeting and was already agreeing collaborative approaches to Fire Investigation and Industrial Relations.
- 2.11 Although not a formal decision making body, the Forum discussed the implications of the funding announcement (Appendix F, item 7) and asked specifically for the CFO's to report back to its next meeting (28 September 2011) on the appetite for a collaborative bid from the individual Fire and Rescue Authorities. The forum did recognise, however, that the underlying issue within the bidding process is one of collaboration and resilience and it may be that individual submissions could fail to realise the full rewards on offer from CLG.
- 2.12 Throughout September all of those Fire and Rescue Authorities within the region, who are interested in the collaborative approach, will be considering similar reports from their respective CFOs, with a view to having an overall picture by 28 September 2011 as to the potential for a collaborative submission to CLG.
- 2.13 Clearly now the Fire Authority's original decision of 24 June 2011 has had to be brought forward due to the time pressures imposed by Central Government with the bidding process. The original decision remains sound in that the two options are both available to the Service although the Fire Authority now has to consider the potential impact of the available grant on the Service's finances and the ability of the Service to meet all of the specific objectives without regional collaboration and through self-financing or Government support "of up to £1.8 million".
- 2.14 With this in mind the CFO, with his regional colleagues, has been investing time in researching and visiting providers of mobilising systems to see what potential is available to this Service. This research has revealed a strong potential for the Service to provide a hybrid solution of the two options previously considered, and implement a 'hub and client' approach.
- 2.15 The Future Fire Control Services Scheme bidding process emphasises the need for increased resilience and collaboration. A 'hub and client' approach would meet this criteria and would increase the potential of the Services

within the collaboration drawing down the maximum funding to support this initiative.

- 2.16 In simple theory this approach would see the mobilising of 3/4 Services within the region despatched from a single mobilising system, but staffed from 3/4 locations. Depending on the times of day and demands on Services, staffing levels may fluctuate accordingly, resulting in capacity being shared across the contributing Services. Hypothetically two control centres could be in operation during the night, whilst all four could be working during the peak demand periods.
- 2.17 Such an approach would see the Services have resilience, through fall-back arrangements to each other, as well as a wider fall-back capability to another Service or region as a second stage if required. It would certainly meet DCLG's expectations with regard to value for money and efficiency, as the Services could claim savings against procurement and maintenance of the system as well as reduced staffing costs over time. There may also be the potential to utilise any capacity within the operation to take on other Services' mobilising requirements if requested, and generate income to reduce the cost base. Additionally in Nottinghamshire's case the costs of maintaining the secondary control centre at Central, and the potential to replace this as part of the relocation would be reduced.
- 2.18 This arrangement, if accepted, would see NFRS retain its existing facility on site, but receive a new mobilising system funded by central government. As previously submitted to the Fire Authority, the existing system is maintained until December 2014, although the station end equipment upgrade is far more pressing. The Service is currently expecting to spend £52k of the earmarked reserve for Fire Control to keep this equipment viable.
- 2.19 An option such as this also gives the Fire Authority flexibility to co-locate with all or some of the partners involved in the future should they so wish. Once all the systems are in place one or more of the partners may choose to pursue this as an option. Whilst the consultation document and the National Audit Office report make reference to the legacy RCC building at Castle Donington, there is no expectation that Services submitting joint bids will have to use these facilities. Any adoption of such buildings are to be a matter of separate negotiation.
- 2.20 Nottinghamshire's current Control location is contained within the HQ complex, the centre's running costs are comparatively low, and as the site is wholly owned by the Service, there are no lease costs etc. There does exist capacity within the Control Room to expand a little should that be required in the future.
- 2.21 If the Fire Authority were to accept that the hub and client approach presents the best way forward for the Service, then the first stage would be to establish which other Fire and Rescue Services from the East Midlands area would be engaging with the project. This could be achieved by getting an agreement at the next East Midlands Fire Forum meeting on 28 September in

Derby. A subsequent bid by all parties involved could then be submitted to CLG by the deadline date of 4 November 2011.

- 2.22 A joint bid is likely to secure between £3.6 - £7.2 million depending on the number of Services involved in the project. DCLG's preference with such a bid would be to provide the funds on a lead authority basis, although if not acceptable to those involved, a percentage split could be accommodated. Only one bid will be required. This would allow the Services involved to begin a phased project to implement a single system as early as April 2012, when the funding payments will commence.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The financial implications of the bidding process are laid out within the main body of this report and its appendices.
- 3.2 The cost of running the current Control Room is of the order of £1.4m per annum of which just over £1m is staffing.
- 3.3 Although no formal tendering process has been commenced, other Fire and Rescue Services are estimating that the cost of a replacement mobilising system, including station end equipment, is approximately £0.7 million. Annual on-costs are expected to be circa £220k.
- 3.4 It would seem unlikely that any scheme put forward by a Fire Authority which does not show sufficient innovation and/or resilience will receive the full amount of the £1.8m grant funding.

4. HUMAN RESOURCES AND LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IMPLICATIONS

There are implications with regard to both human resources and learning and development as an outcome of this report. The move to a 'hub and client' approach would enable the Service to reduce staffing numbers over time, and negotiation and consultation over working practices would need to be part of any project. Likewise, a new system would require a comprehensive training process for all staff within the Control function.

5. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Equalities considerations would have to be made as part of any project to alter how the Control Centre in Nottinghamshire operates. A full impact assessment would need to be produced.

6. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

There are no crime and disorder implications arising from this report.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The Fire Authority has a legal duty under Section 7, 2(c) of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to “make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel.”
- 7.2 Failure to provide and maintain sufficient arrangements to meet this obligation could lead to a legal process being undertaken.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Fire Authority is faced with an ageing mobilising system, a legal duty for answering calls and summoning resources, as well as a shrinking financial capacity due to austerity measures currently being implemented. Any proposals with regard to the Fire Control facility must meet these risks and mitigate or eliminate the impact.
- 8.2 The proposed approach to resolving these risks is the hub and client approach, as this provides the greatest level of mobilising resilience in the event of catastrophic failure, it utilises to the maximum centralised funding from CLG with limited revenue impact on the Service, and it will update the existing facility ensuring that the Service continues to meet its statutory duty.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Fire Authority:

- 9.1 Accept the report of the Chief Fire Officer on the Future Fire Control Services Scheme.
- 9.2 Support the hub and client approach to future Control services if a collaborative bid can be achieved.
- 9.3 Task the Chief Fire Officer with submitting to the bidding process with those Services willing to engage in the project.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS FOR INSPECTION (OTHER THAN PUBLISHED DOCUMENTS)

None.

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National Audit Office

**REPORT BY THE
COMPTROLLER AND
AUDITOR GENERAL**

**HC 1272
SESSION 2010–2012**

1 JULY 2011

Department for Communities and Local Government

The failure of the FiReControl project

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National Audit Office

Department for Communities and Local Government

The failure of the FiReControl project

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in accordance with
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Amyas Morse
Comptroller and
Auditor General

National Audit Office

29 June 2011

FiReControl commenced in 2004 and was expected to be complete by October 2009. However, the project was subject to a number of delays and costs escalated over its lifetime. The Department for Communities and Local Government cancelled the project in December 2010 after concluding that it could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe.

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Methodology **35**

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This report can be found on the
National Audit Office website at
www.nao.org.uk/firecontrol-2011

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Key facts

£120m

original estimate to complete project

£250m

total project spend to end March 2011

£469m

minimum that will be wasted as a result of the failure to deliver the project

5 years

Anticipated delay to the delivery of the project before its cancellation.

£120 million

The Department's original estimate of project costs in July 2004.

£635 million

The Department's forecast total project cost at the time the decision was taken to cancel.

£469 million

Minimum that will be wasted as a result of the failure to deliver. The Department is taking action to minimise additional costs which, if no action were taken, could be as high as a further £180 million.

NOTES

Except for where stated, all figures in the report are in nominal cash terms.

The figure for the minimum wasted as a result of the failure to deliver the project is based on the total project spend and project future spend on regional control centres. Losses and liabilities are reported in the Department's 2010-11 Resource Account.

Summary

1 FiReControl aimed to improve the resilience, efficiency and technology of the Fire and Rescue Service by replacing 46 local control rooms with a network of nine purpose-built regional control centres using a national computer system to handle calls, mobilise equipment and manage incidents.

2 FiReControl commenced in 2004 and was expected to be complete by October 2009. In 2007, the Department for Communities and Local Government (the Department) contracted European Air and Defence Systems (EADS) (now Cassidian) to design, develop and install the computer system underpinning the project. However, the project was subject to a number of delays and costs escalated over its lifetime.

3 The Department cancelled the project in December 2010 after concluding that it could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe. At the point the decision was made, the Department estimated it had spent £245 million on the project and calculated that completion would take the total cost of the project to £635 million, more than five times the original estimate of £120 million.

4 This report examines why the Department failed to deliver the project and the extent to which it is minimising waste arising from the decision to terminate.

Key findings

FiReControl was flawed from the outset because it did not have the support of the majority of those essential to its success – its users

5 The approach and regional structure underpinning the project were not generally supported by those that were essential to its success – Fire and Rescue Services. The Department did not make sufficiently clear the case for a centrally-dictated standard model of emergency call handling and mobilisation, operating from new purpose-built regional control centres. From the start many local Fire and Rescue Authorities and their Fire and Rescue Services criticised the lack of clarity on how a regional approach would increase efficiency. Early on, the Department's inconsistent messages about the regionalisation of the Fire and Rescue Service led to mistrust and some antagonism.

6 The Department did not sufficiently incentivise local Fire and Rescue

Authorities to partner in FiReControl's delivery. Local Fire and Rescue Authorities were under no obligation to use the regional facilities. The Department did not devise, or communicate a set of sufficient incentives to encourage them to support its delivery. None of those who responded to our survey were satisfied with the way in which the Department communicated operating arrangements for the regional control centres. Accountability for delivery was not placed in the hands of the Fire and Rescue Authorities that had the authority to commit the resources and accept operational responsibility.

The Department underestimated the project's complexity and costs whilst benefits were exaggerated

7 The Department underestimated the complexity of designing a system to meet the needs of Fire and Rescue Services and then failed to provide effective management.

The Department assumed that the development of the IT system would be straight-forward, involving the integration of already customised components. However, in order to accommodate the wide variation in operational needs of the Fire and Rescue Services, key components required substantial modification. The Department did not take sufficient ownership of the development of the IT system to achieve the required standardisation, delegating too much responsibility for ensuring the needs of services were met to the contractor. In 2009, an Office of Government Commerce review found that there was no single, authoritative owner of the user requirements and that bringing together 45 sets of rules across the Fire and Rescue Service was inherently complex.¹

8 FiReControl was based on unrealistic estimates of project costs and expected local savings.

The Department and Treasury committed to the project in 2004, but did so on the basis of very broad-brush and unrealistic estimates of costs of £120 million and an anticipated overall net saving of £86 million. These estimates did not include the costs of meeting local and regional implementation, or the costs of installing equipment, and overestimated the savings that could be achieved locally. It was not until 2007 that the Department carried out its first comprehensive assessment of costs and savings, which estimated the project would cost £340 million, and in fact involved additional expenditure of £50 million.

The Department failed to provide the necessary leadership and management to make the project successful

9 Governance arrangements in the first five years of the project were complex and ineffective, which led to unclear lines of responsibility and slow decision-making.

Additional layers of governance were created in response to emerging issues without clear lines of decision-making, accountability, responsibility, assurance, or internal challenge. In 2008, the Office of Government Commerce concluded that the project board was not operating as an effective decision-making

¹ *Report on FiReControl project, Office of Government Commerce, October 2009.*

forum.² It was similarly concerned in 2009 about a cultural failing to share bad news early “across the breadth of the project” and that too many false starts and promises on resource requirements undermined confidence.³ The Department strengthened its governance arrangements in 2009, but it was too late to rectify earlier problems.

10 The project lacked consistent leadership and direction, and was characterised by a high turnover of staff and over-reliance on poorly managed consultants. During the life of the project there have been five different Senior Responsible Owners, four different Project Directors and five officers supervising the delivery of the technology. Only two senior managers worked on the project for its duration, one of whom, the project manager, was on contract from a consultancy. There was no framework to assess consultants’ performance until late 2008, despite the fact that consultants and temporary contract staff made up almost half the Department’s project team during this period.

11 Until 2009, the Department did not take a sufficient grip to sort out early problems with delivery by the contractor for the IT system. There was little real progress due to problems with the integration of a number of sub-systems, and the Department’s failure to ensure that EADS followed the contracted approach in developing the system, until spring 2009, when the Department started to get a grip on the situation. A lack of openness and an adversarial stance between both parties towards problem solving led to the slow resolution of issues.

12 Poor contract design impeded the resolution of issues and the termination of the project at an earlier stage. A lack of interim milestones undermined the Department’s ability to hold EADS to account for delivery. The payment schedule meant that EADS would be paid only once a key milestone for the building and testing of the system had been passed. The delays to delivery led to cash flow difficulties for EADS, which created further tensions in an already strained relationship.

The Department took decisive action to cut its losses and cancel FiReControl

13 The Department took action from June 2010 and committed to holding EADS to contract, with a view to terminating if it could not deliver, whilst reducing the risks to the Department posed by termination. The Department considered contingency options and termination of the contract in 2008 and 2009, but decided to continue on the basis that, at the time, it had confidence in EADS’ continuing ability to deliver. In June 2010, the Department took legal advice and decided that it would be unable to terminate its contract with EADS without incurring substantial compensation payments provided for under the contract. The Department activated a key milestone for EADS in June 2010 requiring EADS to deliver the IT system by mid-2011, and between July and October it documented a series of outstanding breaches against the project agreement. In November 2010, following further legal advice, the Department placed EADS in material breach of contract.

² *Report on FiReControl project*, Office of Government Commerce, October 2008.

³ *Report on FiReControl project*, Office of Government Commerce, October 2009.

14 The Department was justified in cancelling the project. The Department estimated that continuing with FiReControl would cost £390 million, but that delivery would be delayed by another year to May 2012. In comparison, cancelling the project and upgrading local control rooms would cost between £310 and £400 million. The uncertainty over delivery and associated additional costs of FiReControl were such that the Department decided that the contract should be terminated.

15 On terminating the IT contract, the Department received a settlement of £22.5 million from EADS, but during the project made an overall net payment to EADS. The Department agreed a settlement with the contractor in December 2010. During the contracted period, the Department paid EADS £40.0 million. Alongside the settlement, the Department retained equipment worth £5.7 million. This resulted in an overall net payment of £11.7 million being paid to EADS. Although the compensation from EADS cannot be described as significant in the wider sense of the project's overall expenditure, the Department's position at the time, due to underlying weaknesses in the contract, justifies it in considering the outcome to be better than it might have feared.

16 The Department's failure to manage the project as a whole has resulted in the creation of empty regional control centres. The nine regional control centres were purpose-built to house the new computerised equipment and were designed specifically for that purpose. The Department's decision to prioritise the procurement of the centres over the IT system at an early stage meant that the first centres were completed in June 2007, just three months after the IT contract had been awarded. All nine regional control centres were delivered before the cancellation of the project. The Department incurred costs of £32 million in upkeep of the empty centres to the end of March 2011.

17 The Department is trying to reduce ongoing future waste by incentivising local Fire and Rescue Services to use the empty regional control centres. The Department is responsible for rent, utilities and facilities management costs for each of the nine regional control centres. It is currently offering Fire and Rescue Services subsidies to use the centres, but so far only the London control centre has been re-let. The likely remaining total cost of the centres to the Department is estimated to be a minimum of £247 million, and up to £431 million, until the final lease has expired in 2035.

18 The cancellation of FiReControl means local control room functionality and interoperability continues to be variable. The Department ran a consultation on the future of fire and rescue control services in England between January and April 2011, which asked Fire and Rescue Services whether the original objectives of FiReControl remained important, and how these might be achieved. The Department's preferred approach of increased collaboration – determined locally – with some government funding, was widely supported.

Conclusion on value for money

19 This is an example of bad value for money. FiReControl will have wasted a minimum of £469 million, through its failure to provide any enhancement to the capacity of the control centres of Fire and Rescue Services after seven years. At root, this outcome has been reached because the Department, without sufficient mandatory powers, decided to try to centrally impose a national control system on unwilling locally accountable bodies, which prize their distinctiveness from each other and their freedom to choose their own equipment. At the same time, it tried to rush through key elements of project initiation and ended up with an inadequate IT contract, under-appreciating its complexity and risk, and then mismanaged problems with the IT contractor's performance and delivery.

20 The key aims of delivering a new IT system and introducing business change at the local level were undelivered. The delivery of nine regional control centres took place but they currently remain empty and are costly to maintain. The Department is now trying to minimise the future cost of these buildings, which could be as high as £431 million over the remaining 24 years, by transferring their leases to Fire and Rescue Authorities, but currently it has few other means of substantially reducing its liabilities.

21 We recognise the Department made a bold decision to cut its losses by terminating the contract and limiting the downside as far as possible.

Recommendations

22 The issues leading up to this failed project are by no means unique or isolated. Government IT projects can appear to take on a life of their own, continuing to absorb resources without ever reaching their objectives.

23 This report contains three sets of recommendations to:

- a** address the immediate need for the Department for Communities and Local Government to ensure waste as a result of FiReControl is kept to a minimum;
- b** ensure other Departments learn the lessons from the way FiReControl was terminated; and
- c** help the Department for Communities and Local Government to continue to develop its approach and capacity to tackle large-scale IT enabled change projects in the future.

a On reducing further waste from FiReControl

24 The future cost of regional control centres is likely to be high because of the long-term leases agreed with developers. The Department has yet to establish how the original project objectives of FiReControl of resilience and efficiency can be achieved. The Department should manage this process as a new programme with clear objectives, lines of reporting and governance. In so doing, it should:

- continue to work closely with local Fire and Rescue Services to encourage them to utilise regional control centres and, where this is unlikely, examine ways to maximise utilisation by exploring demand from other public and private sector bodies;
- identify effective levers to encourage Fire and Rescue Services to work together;
- consider how the required level of assurance on sub-national interoperability can be met where the Department is unwilling to use its power to impose solutions on Fire and Rescue Services;
- review whether local arrangements provide sufficient certainty of response and deployment of resources on a local, regional and national level; and
- ensure there is a clear process for measuring outcomes, evaluating performance and demonstrating value for money through local delivery.

b On holding contractors to account and terminating projects

25 The terms and conditions of the FiReControl contract with EADS limited the Department's ability to hold them to account. Departments managing long-term projects should:

In designing a contract;

- ensure contract terms and conditions clearly define accountabilities, responsibilities and the requirements which if not met will constitute material breach; and
- retain Departmental ownership and accountability for the risks critical to the project's success.

Government Departments can nevertheless learn lessons from the Department when terminating a contract;

- sharpen short-term contractor performance management, by using milestones and benchmarks to build up robust evidence on performance shortfalls; and
- put in place a strong negotiating team, combining experience of working with the contractor and wider expertise.

c On tackling large-scale IT-enabled change projects in the future

26 Many of the weaknesses in the management of FiReControl are similar to those identified in previous reports on the Department's projects, such as those on New Dimension and Firebuy.⁴ The Department has put in place changes to its management approach and governance since 2009, but it needs to satisfy itself that these address the lessons learnt from FiReControl and embrace the principles set out in the Government's new ICT strategy which are designed to reduce project failure and waste. The Department needs to check the adequacy of the change it has made to ensure the following:

- treat IT projects as business change projects from the outset, working to align the business purpose, the change needed to be delivered and the IT system(s) to enable project benefits to be maximised;
- develop appropriate IT and project management capacity in-house and reduce over-reliance on consultancy;
- understand and resolve cultural as well as technical obstacles;
- ensure end users are fully part of the programme team from the outset;
- ensure that the business case and approval process apply an appropriate level of optimism bias adjustment and challenge;
- ensure that expected costs and benefits and delivery timetables are based upon robust data and an accurate assessment of the project's complexity;
- establish critical path analysis, sequencing and aligning project elements;
- ensure rewards and incentives reflect the balance of financial risks and exposure throughout the life of the project; and
- ensure more transparent control procedures and criteria for evaluating project viability.

⁴ Comptroller and Auditor General, *New Dimension – Enhancing the Fire and Rescue Services' capability to respond to terrorist and other large-scale incidents*, Session 2007-08, HC 1050, National Audit Office, October 2008. *Reducing the cost of procuring Fire and Rescue Service vehicles and specialist equipment*, Session 2010-11, HC 285, National Audit Office, July 2010.

Part One

Introduction

The FiReControl Project

1.1 The Department for Communities and Local Government (the Department) is responsible for setting national strategic policy and direction for the Fire and Rescue Service in England, and for managing national programmes, such as the Fire and Resilience Programme (**Figure 1**), of which FiReControl is a part.

1.2 The 46 local Fire and Rescue Authorities in England are accountable for the delivery of Fire and Rescue Services in their areas. These bodies respond to fires, road traffic accidents and other incidents, while day-to-day management of each Service is undertaken by the Chief Fire Officer. Each Fire and Rescue Service has access to a local control room which handles emergency calls from members of the public, manages incidents and dispatches fire engines, firefighters and equipment to the incident.

1.3 FiReControl had three main elements:

- Accommodation – to deliver nine purpose-built buildings to house the regional control centres.
- Information Technology – to deliver the computer equipment and systems to handle calls, mobilise fire engines (or other equipment) and manage incidents on a national basis.
- Business change – to support Fire and Rescue Services' business change, including preparing each Service for new operational processes and policies, staffing and ways of working.

1.4 The regional control centres were expected to improve on the then current local arrangements by providing purpose-built, secure and resilient facilities, networked across England so that each could back the other up in times of increased call pressure or failure, with each having access to the same information and the ability to manage and deploy resources on a local, regional or national level.

1.5 The Department centrally funded the development of the national IT system, covered the rental and maintenance payments for regional control centres until their transfer to Fire and Rescue Services, and costs incurred by local Fire and Rescue Services in preparation for their transition to these centres.

Figure 1

The Fire and Resilience Programme

FiReControl was part of the Department's Fire and Resilience Programme, a £1 billion investment to strengthen the national and local resilience of the Fire and Rescue Service. The programme consisted of three projects:

- Firelink – to provide a single, digital-wide area radio system for Fire and Rescue Services across England, Scotland and Wales.
- New Dimension – to provide specialist equipment and training in England and Wales to deal with major incidents, such as terrorist attacks and flooding.
- FiReControl – to improve efficiency by replacing local Fire and Rescue control rooms with nine purpose-built regional control centres, and resilience, using enhanced technology to enable a more effective handling of calls, mobilisation of equipment and management of incidents.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Departmental documents

1.6 The Department started FiReControl in 2004 and expected it to be rolled out between late 2007 and late 2009. However, the project was subject to a number of delays due to difficulties in the delivery of the computer system (**Figure 2** overleaf) and costs escalated over the lifetime of the project. The Department cancelled FiReControl in December 2010 after concluding that it could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe. At the point of cancellation, the Department estimated it had spent £245 million on FiReControl and calculated that completion would require at least £390 million more, taking the total project cost to more than five times the original estimate.

1.7 Following the cancellation, the Department held a consultation on the future of fire and rescue control services in England between January and April 2011, including how the objectives of the project could be met in other ways. Its preferred approach is one of increased collaboration, determined locally, with government support.

Scope and Rationale

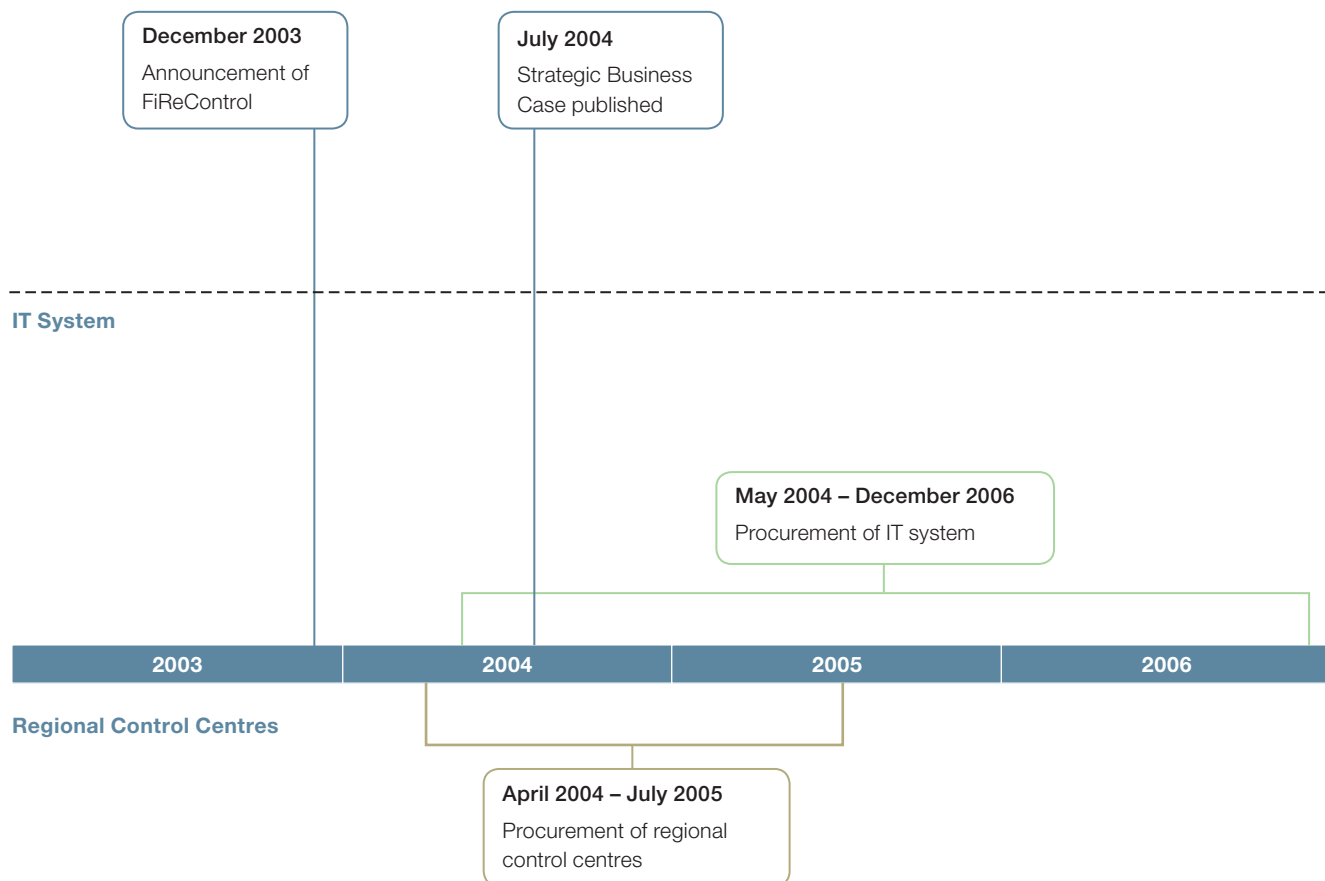
1.8 In February 2010, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee held an enquiry on FiReControl, for which we provided a memorandum. This memorandum set out the key issues that had arisen over the course of the IT project to help inform the Select Committee's enquiry. This report examines the reasons for the Department's failure to deliver the project overall and the consequences of the failure, including:

- Initiation and design (Part Two)
- Delivery (Part Three)
- Project termination (Part Four)

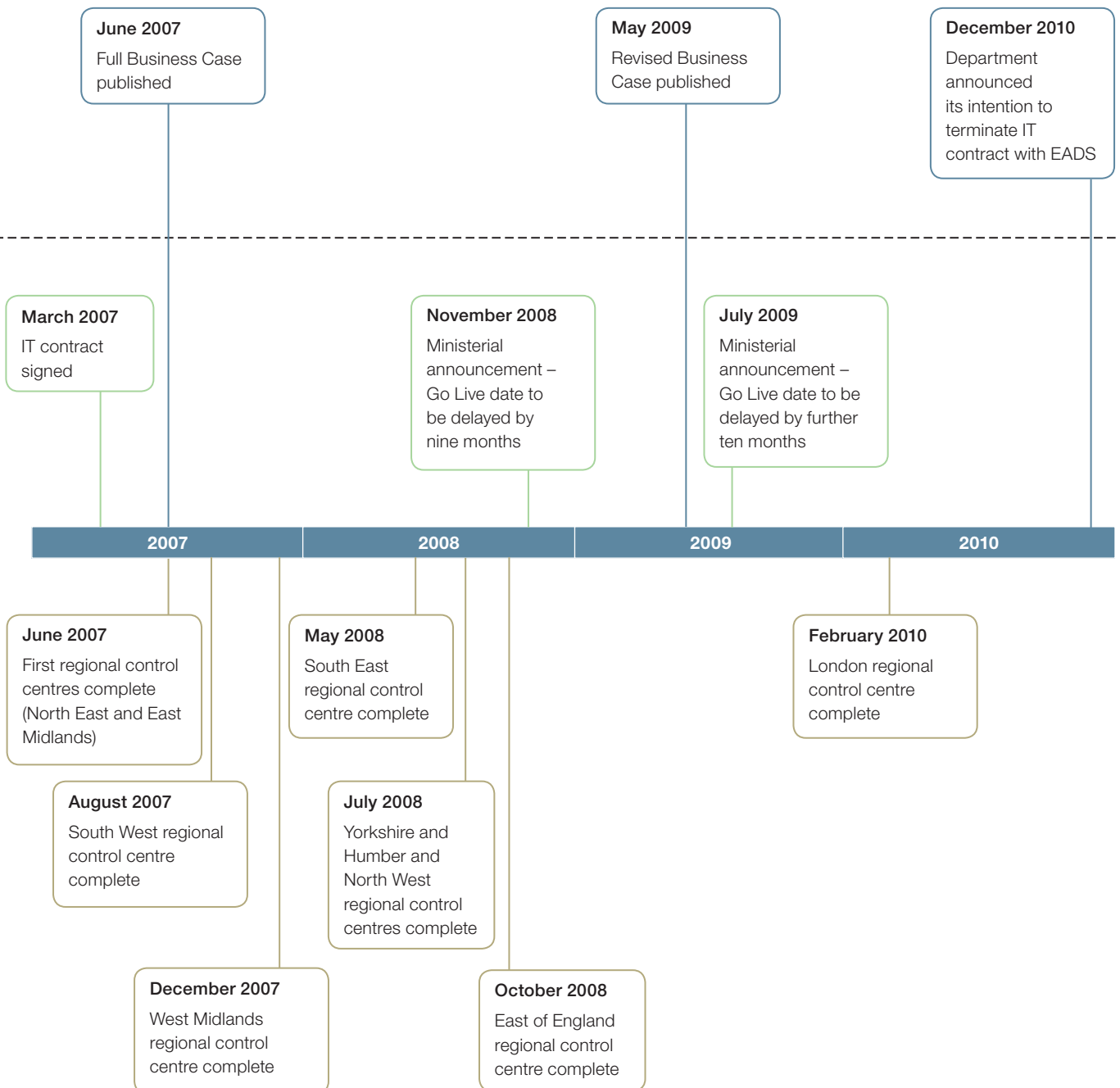
1.9 Our methodology is summarised in Appendix One.

Figure 2
Timeline of key events

FiReControl



Source: National Audit Office review of Departmental documents



Part Two

Initiation and Design of FiReControl

The approach and regional structure underpinning the project were not generally supported by those essential to its success

2.1 FiReControl aimed to replace local control rooms with nine purpose-built regional control centres. The approach was based on a report on the Future of Fire Service Control Rooms and Communication by consultants Mott MacDonald in April 2000.⁵ This concluded that maximum efficiency could be achieved in the Fire and Rescue Service by reducing the number of control rooms from the 46 local controls in England to nine regional controls. The report recognised, however, that this was not an achievable goal in the short- to medium-term, and instead recommended a reduction to 21 sub-regional controls.

2.2 The need to ensure and enhance the resilience of the Fire and Rescue Service to respond to national or large-scale emergencies highlighted by events of 11 September 2001 prompted an update to the Mott MacDonald report in 2003.⁶ This recommended that the Government should adopt a national strategy to reduce the number of local control rooms and form regional control rooms to match the Government Offices within each region. The Government set out its vision for the regionalisation of the Fire Service in June 2003, and the announcement of FiReControl followed in December 2003.⁷

2.3 FiReControl affected the operation of every Fire and Rescue Service in England, but insufficient communication and engagement with stakeholders during the initiation and design of the project led to concerns about its rationale and purpose from the outset. Fire and Rescue Authorities and their Services criticised the lack of clarity on how a regional approach would increase efficiency. The Local Government Association similarly asserted throughout the planning and delivery of FiReControl that a centrally-dictated, one size fits all model was not an appropriate way to optimise resilience. Our survey of Fire and Rescue Services found that twenty-two out of twenty-seven respondents were dissatisfied with the way in which the Department engaged with their service prior to the approval of the project. The Communities and Local Government Select Committee concluded in 2006 that the Department had sent mixed messages about its 'inconsistent' policy for regionalisation, and recommended that further regionalisation should not take place without wide consultation and clear justification of its aims.⁸

⁵ *The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales*, Mott MacDonald, April 2000.

⁶ *The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales: Update 2003* – Mott MacDonald, December 2003.

⁷ *Our Fire and Rescue Service White Paper*, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, June 2003.

⁸ *The Fire and Rescue Service*, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2005-06, July 2006.

The Department did not sufficiently incentivise Fire and Rescue Services

2.4 Fire and Rescue Authorities or their Services were not legally or contractually obliged to use the regional control centres once complete. Despite this, the Department failed to effectively communicate the benefits of transferring to a regional structure, or the arrangements for this transition. None of those who responded to our survey were satisfied with the way in which the Department communicated operating arrangements after their transfer to the regional control centres.

2.5 The Department's engagement with the Fire and Rescue Service at the start of the project failed to elicit their support for FiReControl. The Department did not provide accurate or timely information on the project's progress, nor did it address specific concerns regarding the delivery of the project, both of which led to a lack of support and raised doubts about the project's ability to meet the Department's objectives. In 2006, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee concluded that the resulting opposition from the Fire and Rescue Service posed the greatest risk to the project's success.⁹ Nineteen (out of twenty-seven) Fire and Rescue Services responding to our survey were dissatisfied with the way in which the Department kept them up to date with the project's progress, stating that communications with the Department were poor, and that they felt they had not been listened to. Consequently, FiReControl lacked support from those who were essential to its success.

2.6 The Department published a revised Stakeholder and Communication Strategy in April 2009, which recognised previous failings and acknowledged that much more needed to be done to build stakeholder trust and confidence, counter misinformation and provide the necessary information to ensure the successful delivery of the project. The Department committed to significantly enhancing its stakeholder engagement and communications to ensure that relationships with stakeholders improved, which was recognised by recipients. In 2010, the Communities and Local Government Select Committee concluded that, whilst this had a positive impact, more still needed to be done to shift the negative perception of the project and to influence Fire and Rescue Authorities to adopt FiReControl once delivered.¹⁰

The Department approved the project on the basis of unrealistic estimates of costs and expected local savings

2.7 The early stages of FiReControl progressed rapidly but key stages of the process got out of sequence, and neither the project plan nor the business case were finalised before the project's approval. A Gateway Review by the Office of Government Commerce in April 2004 after the project had been approved found that the "extraordinarily fast pace" of the project was introducing new risks to the delivery of the project, and escalating those already identified. The review concluded that the project was in poor condition overall and at significant risk of failing to deliver.

⁹ *The Fire and Rescue Service, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2005-06, July 2006.*

¹⁰ *FiReControl, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Fifth Report of Session 2009-10, April 2010.*

2.8 Early assumptions made by the Department on the project costs were not robust and proved over-optimistic. In July 2004, the Department estimated that FiReControl would cost £120 million to deliver, but this figure underestimated the costs of the project. The Department did not, for example, include the costs of meeting local and regional implementation work, or the costs of installing equipment in the regional control centres.

2.9 The Department substantially revised its figures in the light of more accurate information from Fire and Rescue Services and changes to assumptions about staffing, accommodation and infrastructure cost models. The level of development required for the IT system, however, was much greater than expected and, by February 2006, indicative pricing received from suppliers exceeded early forecasts of costs. By 2007, when the Department undertook a comprehensive assessment of the costs, the total cost of the project was estimated at £340 million, almost three times greater than the original figure.

2.10 The Department similarly overestimated the efficiencies which would be realised by local Fire and Rescue Authorities as a result of FiReControl. In 2004, it estimated that the project would deliver savings of £86 million, a 28 per cent reduction in the cost of running the existing control rooms. The Department's fuller assessment in 2007 found that the running costs of local control rooms were lower than the original figures, and consequently, the expected local efficiencies and savings that would be achieved by the project were reduced. Although overall savings of £23 million per year were expected across the Fire and Rescue Service, not every Fire and Rescue Authority was expected to make net annual cost savings, and the project as a whole was expected to cost £50 million more than the savings forecast. A further revision to the Full Business Case, published in May 2009, estimated that the project would cost £218 million more than it saved (**Figure 3**).

The Department did not appreciate the complexity of the project

2.11 The Department underestimated the complexity of providing a system that satisfied the requirements of 46 autonomous Fire and Rescue Services. The procurement of the main contract to supply the IT system took more than two years to complete, in part because of this complexity. The Department made the assumption that the development of the IT system would be straightforward, involving the integration of already customised components. However, in order to accommodate the wide variation in operational needs of Fire and Rescue Services, key components required substantial modification.

2.12 In addition to their relocation to their regional control centre, FiReControl required each Fire and Rescue Service to adapt the ways their service operated. As late as 2009, the Office of Government Commerce recognised the complexity in the need to standardise 45 sets of rules across the Fire and Rescue Service.¹¹ Agreed ways of working were not established during the project's lifetime.

¹¹ Report on FiReControl Project, Office of Government Commerce, October 2009.

Figure 3

Project delivery timetable and estimated costs/benefits

Business Case	Strategic Outline July 2004 ¹ (£m)	Outline January 2005 ¹ (£m)	Full (Version 1.0) June 2007 ² (£m)	Full (Parts one and two) July 2008 ² (£m)	Revised (Version 1.1) May 2009 ² (£m)	At point of termination December 2010 ³ (£m)
Cost to Department	120	120	340	380	380	635
Efficiency savings per annum for Fire and Rescue Authorities	(22)	(23)	(23)	(8)	(6)	n/a
Overall project (savings) costs as Net Present Value ³	(86)	(42)	50	211	218	n/a
IT operational date	n/a	n/a	October 2009	July 2009	May 2010	n/a
Transfer to regional control centres	2007-09	2008-09	2010-11	2010-12	2010 onwards	2012 onwards

NOTES

- 1 2004-05 prices – pre contract estimate to end of project.
- 2 2006-07 prices – business case figures to the end of the expected life of the ICT assets (2021).
- 3 2010-11 prices – expected cost to complete (including cost to date) to the end of the last regional control centre lease (2035).
- 4 Period under consideration for overall project (savings) cost is 2004-05 to 2020-21. The Net Present Value is the discounted net cash flow, where the discount rate is the same as the time cost of money (3.5 per cent).

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Departmental documents

The Department did not adequately plan the project as a whole

2.13 The procurement of the regional control centres and supporting IT system commenced in April and May 2004, respectively, prior to the finalisation of the project's business case. The procurement of the regional control centres took almost a year longer than expected, while procurement of the IT system took almost two years longer, meaning that the two elements were not aligned from an early stage (**Figure 4** overleaf).

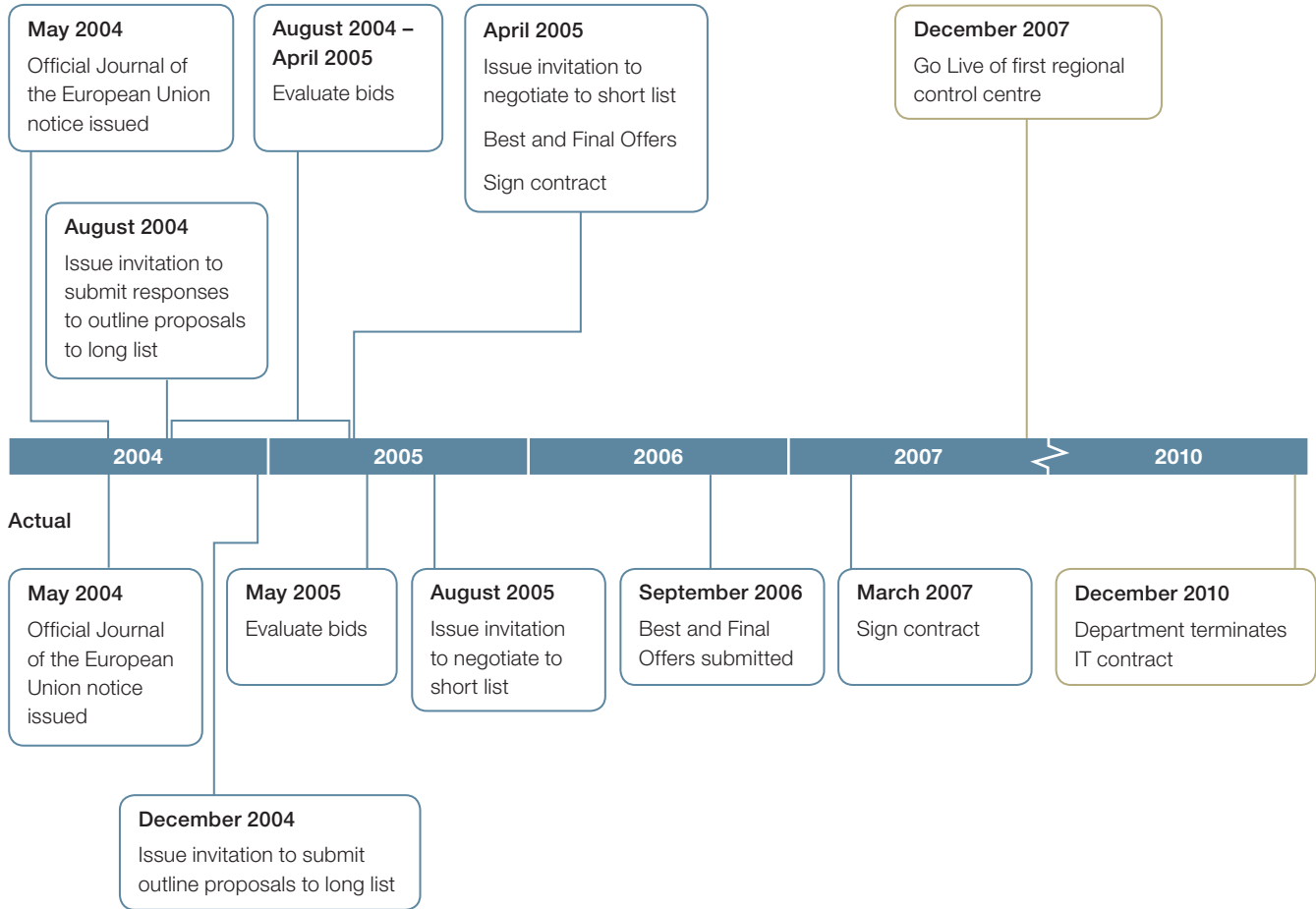
2.14 The Department prioritised the procurement of the regional control centres over that of the IT system at an early stage owing to concerns about the availability of suitable sites, and the requirement to be ready for the roll-out of Firelink in 2007.

2.15 The misalignment in delivery timetables meant that the first two regional control centres, in the North East and East Midlands, were delivered in June 2007, only three months after the IT contract had been awarded, and some eighteen months before the equipment which they would house was expected to be ready.

Figure 4
Procurement Milestones: Planned and Actual

Procurement period for IT system

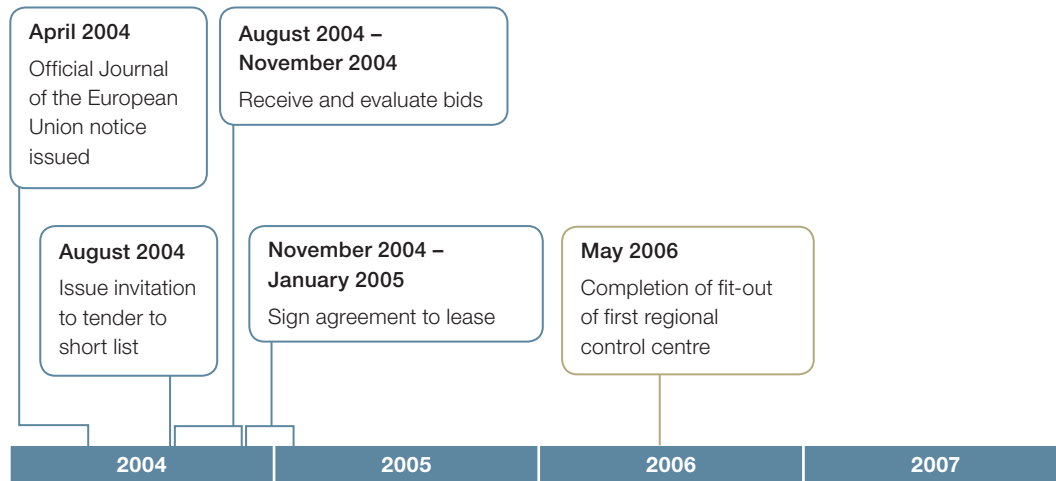
Planned



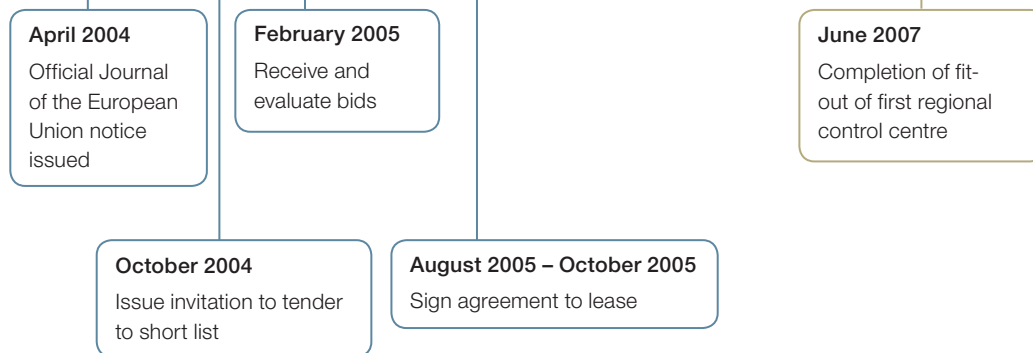
Source: National Audit Office analysis of Departmental documents

Procurement period for regional control centres

Planned



Actual



Part Three

Delivery of FiReControl

Early governance arrangements were complex and ineffective

3.1 Responsibility for delivering FiReControl rested with a Senior Responsible Owner, supported by a project board comprising of stakeholders from the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers' Association, and the IT contractor. The project's delivery was split between a national team, which had responsibility for the planning and delivery of the buildings, the national IT system and business change, and regional teams, which were responsible for the transition to a regional structure.

3.2 Regional Management Boards, established in 2004, were responsible for delivering national policies within each region and managing the changes needed at a local and regional level. Regional Management Boards did not replace Fire and Rescue Authorities but were an intermediary tier between local Fire and Rescue Authorities and national government. Statutory authority continued to rest with the Fire and Rescue Authorities, which limited the ability of Regional Management Boards to influence delivery. The Communities and Local Government Select Committee considered them a confusing addition to already complex governance and structural arrangements.¹²

3.3 The management of FiReControl was characterised by a lack of clarity and effective decision-making, with layers of governance created in response to emerging issues, rather than being aligned. In 2008, the Office of Government Commerce described the governance structure as cumbersome and found that the project board was not operating as an effective decision-making forum. Work streams were operating independently and communicating autonomously with the regions, and the project lacked clear lines of decision-making, accountability or responsibility, and sufficient assurance and robust internal challenge.¹³ A further review in 2009 was concerned there could be a cultural failing to share bad news early "across the breadth of the project" and that too many false starts and promises on resource requirements undermined confidence.¹⁴ The Department reviewed its governance arrangements in 2009 in order to increase the visibility of the project board and provide greater clarity to the lines of decision-making. Stakeholders reacted positively to the revised arrangements, but many in the Fire and Rescue Service had already lost confidence in the project.

¹² The Fire and Rescue Service, Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2005-06, July 2006.

¹³ Report on FiReControl project, Office of Government Commerce, October 2008.

¹⁴ Report on FiReControl project, Office of Government Commerce, October 2009.

FiReControl lacked consistent leadership and direction, with a high turnover of staff and over-reliance on poorly managed consultants

3.4 The management of FiReControl was characterised by a high level of turnover of staff, both within the Department and its main IT contractor, EADS. The Department appointed four Senior Responsible Owners and three Project Directors before those in post at the time of termination were appointed in 2008. EADS similarly has had three different Chief Executive Officers and four Project Directors since the IT contract was awarded.

3.5 The Department spent £89.8 million on its national team for FiReControl to the end of March 2011, which consisted of in-house staff costs (£12.8 million), consultancy costs (£68.6 million), and £8.4 million on secondments.

3.6 The implementation of FiReControl was heavily reliant on consultants and interim staff, who contributed around half the Department's project team at a cost of £68.6 million, over three-quarters of the total spend on the national team supporting the project. PA Consulting was contracted to provide consultancy services at a cost of £42 million to the end of March 2011. Its staff held key positions throughout the project, including the Project Manager, one of only two senior members of the team who remained on the project throughout its duration.

3.7 Despite the Department's reliance on consultants, there was no framework to assess their performance until the end of 2008, when the National Audit Office recommended that the Department's contracts with consultants should include mechanisms to enable regular objective monitoring of performance, such as performance indicators and key milestones.¹⁵ Without such mechanisms, the Department was unable to determine whether or not the services provided offered value for money. A review of the FiReControl project by the Office of Government Commerce in 2008 similarly found that some consultants in key management roles did not have a level of authority matching their responsibilities, which led to decisions being referred to others. Other consultants were found to hold a disproportionate (and accountability-free) amount of authority.¹⁶ In response, the Department reviewed its use of consultants and interims within FiReControl and reduced the number employed, leading to a fall of 24 per cent in consultancy costs between 2008-09 and 2009-10, and a further fall of 26 per cent in the following year.

¹⁵ Comptroller and Auditor General, *New Dimension – Enhancing the Fire and Rescue Services' capacity to respond to terrorist and other large-scale incidents*, Session 2007-2008, HC 1050, National Audit Office, October 2008.

¹⁶ *Report on FiReControl project*, Office of Government Commerce, October 2008.

Until 2009, the Department did not take a sufficient grip to resolve early problems with the delivery of the IT system

3.8 The Department contracted EADS to design, develop and install the IT system which underpinned FiReControl in March 2007, with completion expected in October 2009. The IT system consisted of a number of sub-systems, each of which involved a number of components to be supplied by EADS and its subcontractors.

3.9 There was little real progress in delivering the IT system during the first two years of the contract due to problems with the integration of the system's components, which was compounded by the absence of a partnership approach between EADS and the Fire and Rescue Services. The Department failed to ensure that EADS followed the approach that it had been contracted to follow in developing the system, resulting in little end-user engagement for the first two years of the contract. Twenty-three out of the twenty-seven Fire and Rescue Services that responded to our survey were dissatisfied with their involvement in the design and development of the IT system, which led to a fear that the final system would not meet their professional needs. The uncertainty regarding end user requirements, and how these would align to operational needs led to the establishment of workshops with Fire and Rescue Services, but these didn't commence until June 2009, when the Department started to get a grip on the situation.

3.10 The quality of early deliverables from EADS was criticised by the Department, but there was an absence of cooperation to resolve the issues. The emergence of a poor relationship was compounded by a lack of effective sharing or joint ownership of progress information, and by the Department's ineffective governance and performance management of the contracted processes for elaborating the requirements and producing the detailed design for the main system. An independent review in early 2008 found that there were no agreed product descriptions and associated quality assurance criteria for three of the early deliverables, which were separate from the main IT system, including the data migration toolkit and software to be housed in fire engines. This meant it was difficult for EADS to know what it was trying to produce and for the Department to know what criteria to use when quality assuring the products.¹⁷

3.11 An independent technical review in early 2009 found some suspicion and distrust on both sides, with the Department suspecting that technical progress would not be delivered on time and EADS concerned about the project's implementation and change management approach. During the first two years of the contract there was a lack of openness on either side, and an adversarial stance towards problem solving. There was a tendency by both parties to revert to the contract conditions, rather than using a more mature partnering approach.¹⁸ The relationship improved in July 2009, after the Department created a new technical assurance team and moved it to EADS' Newport premises to work alongside them, but relationships soon deteriorated, with EADS being placed in material breach of contract in October 2009 for failing to meet a key milestone.

¹⁷ *Final report of a review of the EADS FiReControl project*, Actita, February 2008.

¹⁸ *FiReControl Project, Technical Review*, Qi Consulting/QinetiQ, August 2009.

3.12 The absence of a good working relationship contributed towards the slow resolution of problems. The Department was concerned about the delivery of the IT system almost immediately after the award of the contract, but little action was taken until July 2008, when EADS announced that they were unable to meet the milestone date for delivering the design documentation for the main system. The Office of Government Commerce concluded that the delay to engage was predicated on a relationship that had, by then, deteriorated to such an extent that failure, and a potential claim for liquidated damages, were uppermost in participants' minds.¹⁹

A lack of interim milestones in the contract meant neither the Department nor EADS could hold each other to account

3.13 The contract contained key milestones, the majority of which were linked to deliverables provided towards the end of the contract. The lack of interim milestones combined with ineffective project management and planning seriously undermined the Department's ability to hold EADS to account or place it into breach of contract.

3.14 The Department was responsible for ensuring the user requirements accurately reflected the business processes which it agreed with the Fire and Rescue Services during the procurement process. EADS was responsible for ensuring that the requirements, defined during the procurement process, were met by the system. To deliver the IT system, the Department and EADS depended on each other to provide timely information, but this was not fully and clearly explained in the contract, resulting in conflicting opinions about respective contractual positions.

The payment schedule for the IT contract meant the financial risk lay with EADS

3.15 The payment schedule meant that EADS were paid for deliverables aligned to key milestones. Most of these milestones were towards the end of the project, and so for most of the project financial risk lay more with EADS than the Department. In December 2007, the Department sought to assist EADS by bringing forward almost £10 million of payments. In May 2009, EADS informed the Department that following delays to delivery and due to the lack of interim payment milestones, it faced significant cash flow difficulties on the project. In response, the Department sought to assist by offering EADS payments contributing to a total of £7 million on condition of the delivery of a revised project plan, which EADS subsequently failed to deliver to the Department's level of acceptance.

¹⁹ *Report on FiReControl project*, Office of Government Commerce, October 2008.

3.16 The principle of using phased payments to provide contractors with a strong incentive to deliver to time and budget is sound. However, if these payments do not adequately reflect the balance of financial risks and exposure throughout the project it can create perverse incentives, or make it more difficult for the contractor to deliver. In the case of FiReControl, the unbalanced payment schedule contributed towards the breakdown in relations between the Department and EADS.

By July 2009, delays to the delivery of the IT system were set to cost the Department £75 million and created uncertainty amongst the Fire and Rescue Services

3.17 The Department announced two delays, agreed with EADS, to the delivery of the IT system during its development, both on account of technical difficulties. The first delay, in November 2008, extended the first 'Go Live' date for the regional control centres by nine months, while the second, announced in July 2009, extended the 'Go Live' date by a further ten months. This meant the first Fire and Rescue Services were expected to transfer to the regional control centres in May 2011 – four years later than originally planned and 19 months later than planned when the IT contract was awarded. The Department estimated that delays to the delivery of the IT system would cost some £75 million, based on the project's running costs of £4 million per month being incurred over a further 19 months (**Figure 5** on page 28).

3.18 The provision of timely and accurate information to Fire and Rescue Services on progress within the project was a key component of the project's objective to ensure a smooth transition from a local to regional structure. The delays, together with concerns over the delivery of the IT system, and a lack of substantive information on project progress resulted in a wariness of the 'believability' of FireControl's scheduling and a request for greater clarity amongst Fire and Rescue Services. Fourteen of the twenty-seven Fire and Rescue Services who responded to our survey were dissatisfied with the level of engagement by the Department. The Chief Fire Officers Association reported that confidence in the project steadily declined "as poor project management, inadequate communications and deteriorating stakeholder relationships eroded patience, goodwill and faith amongst the Fire and Rescue Authorities."

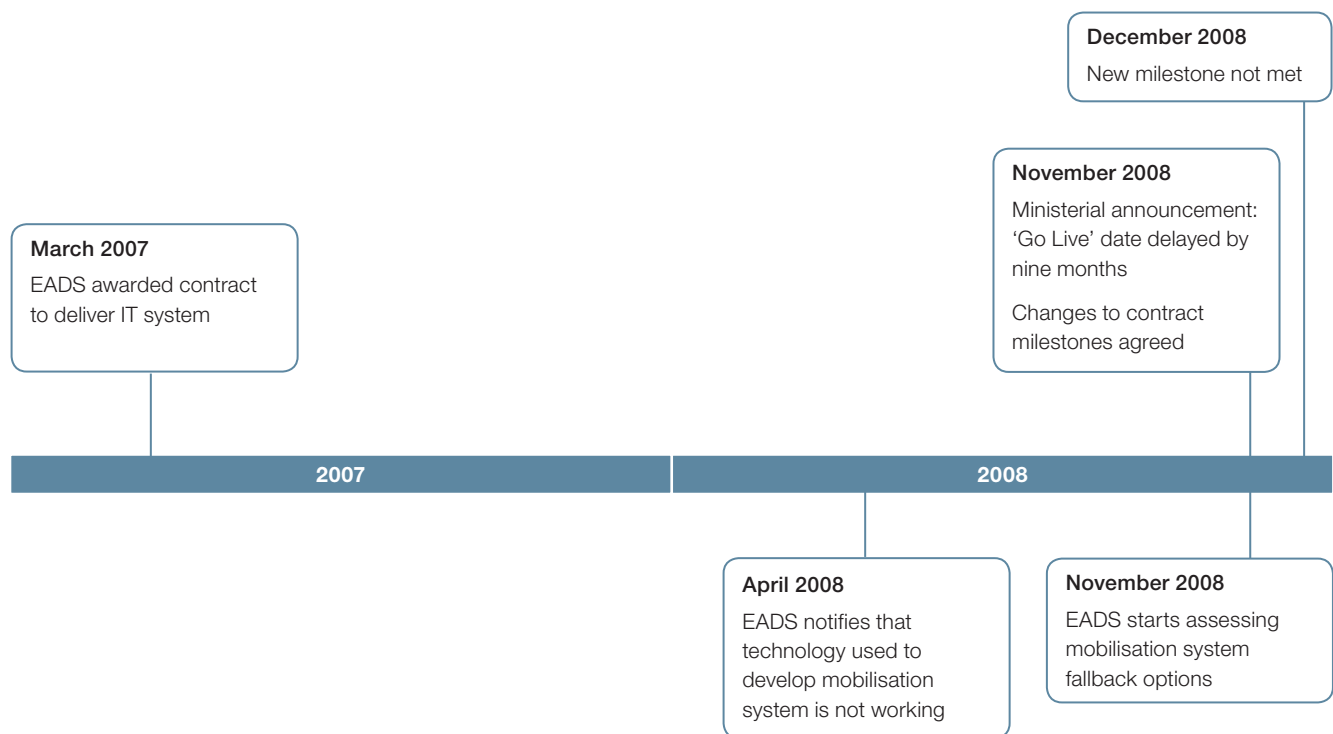
Delays to the delivery of IT meant the Department incurred substantial costs from having high specification and empty regional control centres

3.19 Each regional control centre was delivered by a different developer, with oversight of their delivery contracted to Turner and Townsend. Turner and Townsend supported the Department in assessing bids for the regional control centres and were responsible for designing the layout of the buildings and providing on site supervision. The appointed contractors were responsible for the architectural and detailed design of the buildings. The buildings were delivered to a single pre-defined design and high specification, which would minimise the risks of disruption from natural or man made disaster. This included extensive physical and protective security measures and resilient electrical and environmental systems able to continue operations in the event of power, fuel or water supply failure. All nine regional control centres were delivered before the cancellation of FiReControl. (**Figure 6** on page 30)

3.20 Although the regional control centres could not be used for their intended purpose without the successful delivery of the computer system underpinning the project, the Department began to incur costs six to nine months after each was completed, following a rent-free period during which facilities management and utility costs were still incurred. The Department paid £32 million in upkeep of the empty centres to the end of March 2011, comprising £16 million in rental payments and £16 million on maintenance, support and one-off costs.

3.21 There was little engagement with the intended users of the regional control centres during the planning or design of the buildings, and the Communities and Local Government Select Committee concluded that neither the procurement process, nor the identification of their specification, was properly informed by end users. Twenty of the twenty-seven Fire and Rescue Services that responded to our survey were dissatisfied with the Department's level of engagement with their service during the design and development of the buildings.

Figure 5
Timeline of key events after award of IT contract



Source: National Audit Office Review of Departmental documents

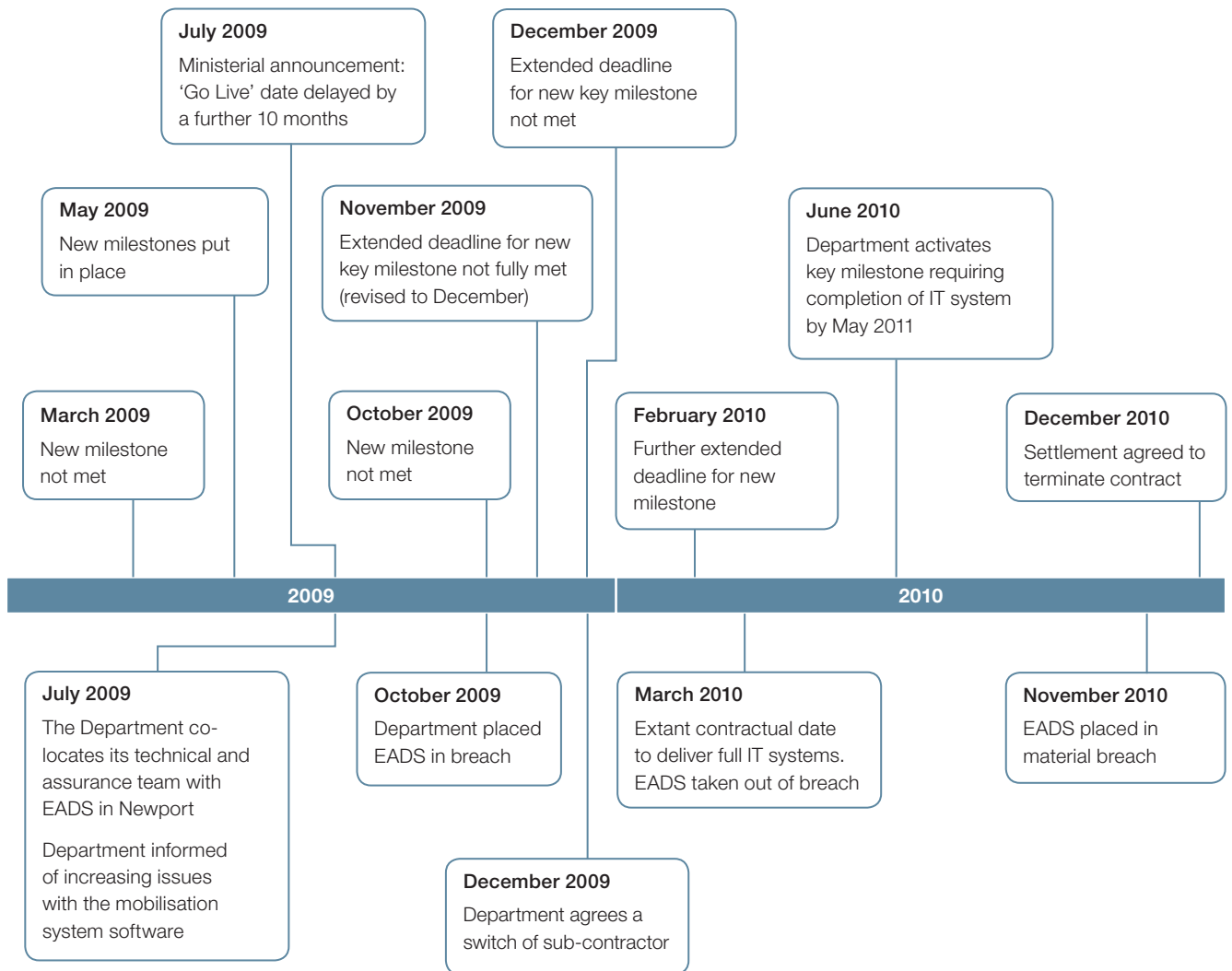
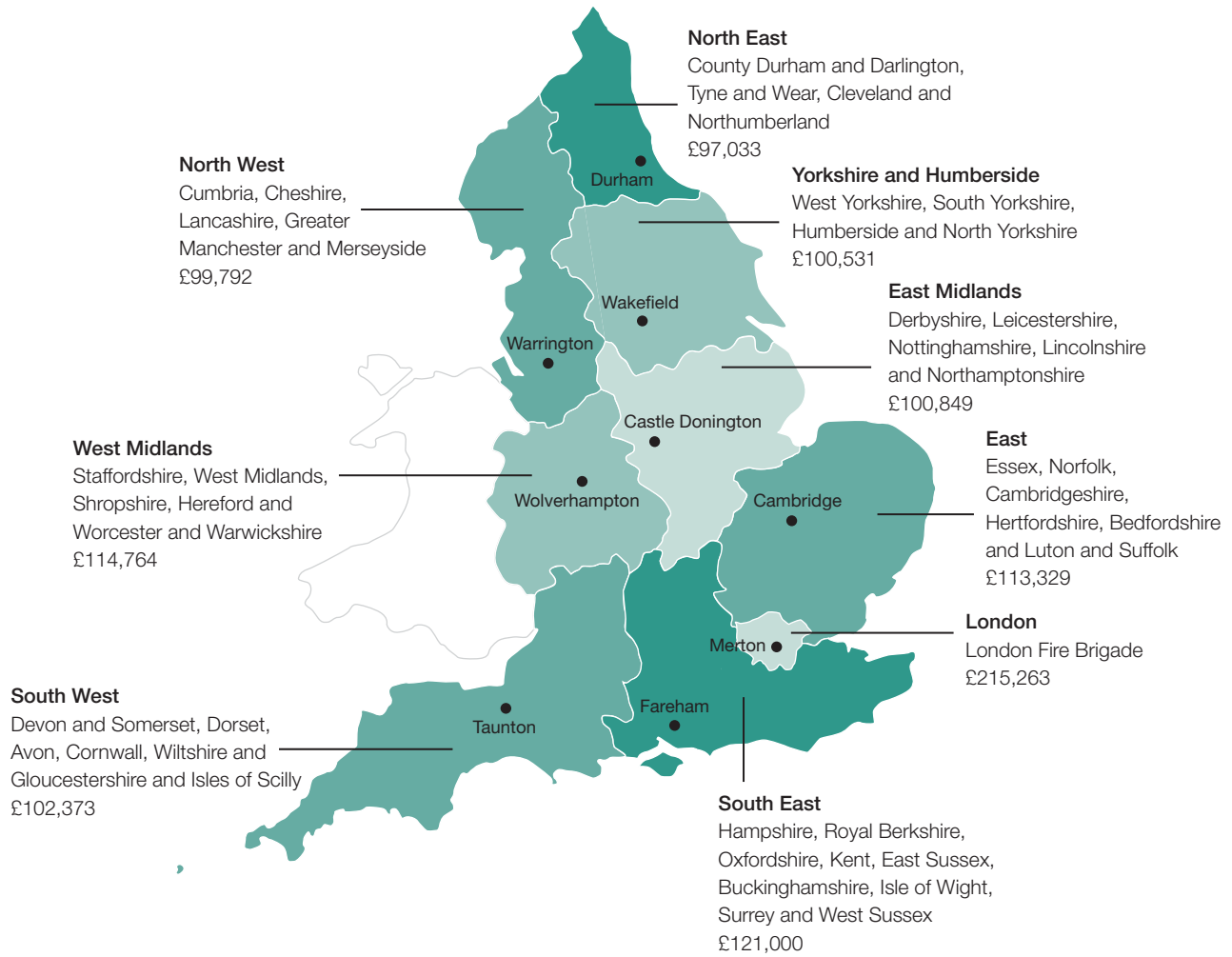


Figure 6

Map of regional control centres showing current monthly rent payments



Source: National Audit Office review of Departmental documents

Part Four

The Termination of FiReControl

The Department took action in June 2010 which enabled it to terminate the project in December 2010

4.1 The Department assessed the deliverability of FiReControl in June 2010 and concluded that, while EADS remained in a position to deliver the IT system underpinning FiReControl, the Department could not be certain of the adequacy of the system, or the time and cost to which it would be delivered. A review by the Office of Government Commerce and the Major Projects Review Group in July 2010 similarly concluded that the successful delivery of the project to the latest deadline appeared unachievable and that the Department should begin negotiations to end the contract with EADS immediately.

4.2 Weaknesses within the contract agreed with EADS limited the options available to the Department. The Department previously considered terminating its contract with EADS as part of contingency options in both November 2008 and July 2009, but decided to continue given it had confidence in EADS' ability to deliver and had concluded that termination would leave the Department liable for substantial costs. The Department similarly concluded in June 2010 that, should it need to, it would be unable to terminate its contract with EADS without incurring substantial compensation payments provided for under the contract if, as seemed likely, a court decided that a key milestone had not been missed.

4.3 The Department reacted quickly to legal advice and its concerns over EADS' ability to deliver, by committing to hold EADS to contract, with a view to terminating if it was unable to deliver. It did this by activating a key milestone which required EADS to complete the main IT system and install it in three control centres by mid 2011. The Department detailed EADS' performance against the project agreement between July and October 2010, cataloguing outstanding breaches of the project agreement. The Department's actions reduced the risks posed by termination and, following further legal advice, it placed EADS in 'material' breach of contract on 8 November 2010.

4.4 The Department considered a number of options before making its decision. It estimated that continuing with FiReControl would cost £390 million but delivery would be delayed by another year to May 2012. In comparison, the cost of cancelling the project and upgrading local control rooms was estimated to be between £310 and £400 million. The uncertainty over delivery and associated additional costs of FiReControl were such that the Department decided that the contract should be terminated (**Figure 7** overleaf).

Figure 7

Total remaining costs by option, December 2010

Option	Scenario	Remaining cost (£m)
Continue with contract	Delivery in May 2011	340
	Delivery in May 2012 (EADS schedule plus 12 months)	390
	Delivery in November 2012 (Expected schedule plus 18 months)	410
Cancel contract	Upgrade local control rooms and meet regional control centre costs	310-400 ¹

NOTE

¹ Dependent on compensation received from, or paid to, EADS.

Source: National Audit Office analysis of Departmental data

The Department agreed a settlement with the contractor

4.5 The Department and EADS agreed to an amicable termination on 10 December and an agreement was reached on 17 December. They jointly announced the termination of the project on 20 December 2010. The final settlement included a payment of £22.5 million from EADS to the Department. A review of the negotiation by the Office for Government Commerce praised the Department in conducting delicate negotiations from a difficult starting point and under circumstances which could have ended badly. At less than five per cent of the overall likely cost of the project, the compensation received from EADS cannot be described as significant in the wider sense, but in the context of the Department's contractual position at the time, it is justified in considering the outcome to be better than it might have feared.

4.6 Over the duration of the contract, the Department paid EADS £40 million, and retained IT software and hardware equipment worth £5.7 million. Taking the settlement into account, the resulting overall net payment to EADS was £11.7 million.

The failure of FiReControl means the Department now plans to build resilience through local arrangements

4.7 The intended level of efficiency, resilience and technology from FiReControl has not been delivered and the Department now plans to incentivise Fire and Rescue Services to achieve these through other means. Whilst the project's IT system was not delivered, other equipment has been, although the extent to which it will be used is variable. The majority of Fire and Rescue Services intend to use equipment such as laptops and portable geographical positioning navigation and messaging devices, whereas fewer intend to use the project's data capture and migration toolkit.

4.8 The level of control room functionality across England was variable before FireControl and remains so after the project's termination. Seventeen of the twenty-seven Fire and Rescue Services that responded to our survey told us that the cancellation of the project had a significant negative operational impact on their service, and twenty-three stated that it had a significant financial impact. Those who had experienced a negative impact had largely postponed upgrades to their control rooms in anticipation of delivery of a new system, or made interim upgrades to their systems following delays to FiReControl. They now need to upgrade their systems or carry out further refresh exercises. Existing control rooms will also need to be upgraded to secure the benefits of Firelink, which was to rely on the software delivered by FiReControl. Most control rooms were provided with an interim means of accessing the Firelink digital radio network, in anticipation of moving to the new control centres, which will now need to be updated.

4.9 The Department ran a consultation exercise on the future of fire and rescue control services between January and April 2011. The Department made it clear that its preferred approach is one of increased collaboration – determined locally – with some government support. Respondents overwhelmingly supported the Department's preferred approach, and welcomed the decision not to impose a one-size fits all solution. Those responding also confirmed that the original objectives of improved resilience, efficiency and technology were at least as important now as when FiReControl was initiated, and many considered efficiency of greater importance than in 2004, given the current economic climate. The Department is continuing to consult with Fire and Rescue Services over the use of existing equipment and how it will prioritise funding and a budget for this has been agreed by the Department, subject to approval from HM Treasury.

The Department will continue to incur significant costs despite the cancellation

4.10 The Department began to close down all activities relating to FiReControl immediately after the project's cancellation. Up to March 2011, the Department incurred costs of £3.2 million in winding down FiReControl. This includes £2.7 million paid to Fire and Rescue Authorities and Local Authority Controlled Companies to meet the costs of closing down the project's regional and local teams, and £0.5 million on the adaptation of IT hardware to local control rooms.

4.11 The Department agreed leases of between 20 and 25 years for each of the regional control centres and, should Fire and Rescue Services or other bodies fail to move in, the Department will continue to be responsible for rent, utilities and facilities management costs for each building over the lifetime of their lease. The leases are with different companies, while the facilities management is provided by a single contractor, with whom the Department is currently negotiating the adoption of cost reductions following the cancellation of the project.

4.12 Fire and Rescue Authorities and their Services are not legally obliged to use regional control centres, and the Department can only encourage them to do so. In a bid to encourage other Fire and Rescue Authorities to use regional control centres, the Department has offered to meet additional accommodation costs should a Fire and Rescue Service, or group of Services, move to a regional control centre. The London centre has been let to the London Fire Brigade who will move in later this year. The Department is currently offering Fire and Rescue Services subsidises to use the centres. If all the remaining eight centres are let to Fire and Rescue Services, the Department will still face a minimum cost of £247 million in rental, utilities and facilities management payments over the next 24 years. Ongoing payments could be as high as £431 million, however, if no regional control centres apart from London, are re-let. Twenty-one out of the twenty-seven Fire and Rescue Services that responded to our survey stated that they were unlikely or definitely would not relocate, citing financial viability as the main reason. Should regional control centres not be fully let to Fire and Rescue Services, the Department will need to find other organisations to which they can sub-let the buildings.

4.13 The Department spent £250 million on FiReControl to the end of March 2011, meaning that, if all regional control centres are re-let, the minimum waste from the project will be £469 million.

Appendix One

Methodology

The main elements of our fieldwork, which took place between March and May 2011, were:

Method

Survey

We conducted an internet-based survey of all 46 Fire and Rescue Services in England, of which 27 (59 per cent), responded. The sample comprised responses for all regions except for London (for which there is one Service).

Interviews

We conducted semi-structured interviews with the Department, EADS and the Fire and Rescue Service.

Document review

We examined the Department's procurement and planning documents, project evaluations and external reviews, operational and contractual information, performance monitoring information, and project closure documents.

Benchmarking against best practice

We compared the Department's performance against National Audit Office/Office of Government Commerce best practice.

Stakeholder consultation

We invited structured submissions from key stakeholders involved in FiReControl: the Local Government Association, the Office of Government Commerce, Chief Fire Officers Association and the Retained FireFighters Union. We invited, but did not receive a response, from the Fire Brigade Union.

Financial analysis

We examined the financial data used by the Department in planning, managing and cancelling FiReControl.

Purpose

To gather quantitative and qualitative data on the support of Fire and Rescue Services for the project, their involvement in its planning and delivery, and the impact of its termination.

To understand the Department's approach and rationale during the planning, design, delivery and cancellation of FiReControl. To discuss in more detail issues raised from the survey of Fire and Rescue Services.

To assess the impact of the cancellation of the project on the Fire and Rescue Service, and the Department's approach to project planning and management.

To compare the way in which FiReControl was procured and managed against best practice and draw parallels across government from previous studies.

To gather the opinions of stakeholders on the delivery of the project, the reasons and impact of delays, and views on termination and next steps. From the IT contractor we sought its views on relations with the Department and lessons to be learnt.

To establish costs of the project and understand the robustness of assumptions and how data was used to inform project decision-making.



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Future of fire and rescue control services in England – consultation

Summary of responses



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Summary of responses

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Section 1

Summary

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consulted on the future of fire and rescue control services in England from 13 January to 8 April 2011. At the start of the consultation, Fire Minister Bob Neill MP made it clear that no solution would be imposed on Fire and Rescue Authorities.

As part of the consultation, officials attended a number of meetings with Fire and Rescue Authorities and senior officers in Fire and Rescue Services to discuss the issues raised in the consultation and their future plans following the termination of the FiReControl project. In total, 61 submissions were received from the public consultation exercise, mainly from fire and rescue authorities and services (41), organisations representing their interests (4), geographical fire and rescue partnerships (3) and suppliers in the fire and rescue industry (8).

A broad consensus emerged, from both the responses and discussions held, on a number of points although views diverged on how some continuing and future objectives should be achieved. These points were:

- The Government's approach of not imposing a solution and leaving the fire and rescue community to decide the best way forward for their service and their communities was widely welcomed.
- Improved resilience, enhanced technology and increased efficiency were considered at least as important now as when the FiReControl project started (by 54 of 55 responses expressing a view). Many felt efficiency was even more important with the current budgetary pressures.
- The great majority (40 of the 42 responses expressing a view) agreed with the summary of lessons learnt from the FiReControl project published in the consultation document. Many of those commenting highlighted early approaches – both decisions made and governance structures set up (24 responses in total) – as core to the project's eventual closure. The perceived lack of involvement of the fire and rescue community in the initial stages and a belief that their input was ignored were widely cited (in 33 responses). Some observed that these issues improved in the later stages. Criticisms of the control centre buildings were also made (in 18 responses).
- The positive legacy most commonly identified was the increased level of collaboration and dialogue between Fire and Rescue Services. Those responding believed this had led to improved understanding, cross-border operations and

shared practices. The Ways of Working strand of the FiReControl project was seen as providing a basis for future work on common procedural standards (15 of those responding were positive about this).

- The approach described in the consultation document of increased collaboration – determined locally – with some Government support was most popular (with 42 of the 50 expressing a view – 84 per cent) as the way ahead.
- Nearly two-thirds of those selecting this collaborative approach wanted to see it combined with national technical standards, operating protocols and procedures. The majority believed these should be sector led and government supported although some suggested that government would need to play a stronger role to ensure adoption. Common standards were also advocated in relation to other aspects of the consultation, eg for interoperability so more resilient fallback and overload arrangements could be established.
- Future plans, and the stage they had reached, varied widely among Fire and Rescue Authorities.
- Most Fire and Rescue Authorities and Services, including their representative organisations and groups (35 out of 43 expressing a view – three did not express a view and two rated all options equally) saw the completion of the Firelink network to deliver enhanced voice services and a data operating environment as the top priority for funding. The favoured technical option for Firelink (by 29 of the 35 expressing a view) was to implement a fully networked voice and data service in existing control rooms.
- Fire and Rescue Authorities emphasised that they needed rapid clarity from the Government on funding available, and how it would be allocated, so they could progress with their plans.

The responses contained a wide variety of views on other aspects of the consultation – sometimes contradictory views on a particular issue were expressed in different responses.

Legacy assets

At the same time as the consultation took place, discussions on the future use of the control centres have resulted in the lease on the London building being assigned to the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority following agreement on a suitable arrangement over costs. The Government's preference is for the buildings to be used by Fire and Rescue Services, as originally intended, but where agreement cannot be reached, the Department will seek other suitable tenants for them. At present discussions continue with Fire and Rescue Authorities, some working in collaboration, on a number of the other buildings.

The Chief Fire Officers' Association has kindly agreed to host on its website some of the legacy data assets from the FiReControl project. These include outputs from the harmonised Ways of Working strand. National datasets have been divided by Fire and Rescue Service area and circulated to the appropriate service.

Next steps – funding for improvements

Following the Fire Minister's consideration of the responses, the Department intends to take forward a strategy of supporting enhancements to fire and rescue control and mobilisation arrangements in a way that delivers improvements to resilience, security and efficiency. This will build national resilience through enhanced local rather than national solutions. The Department will provide funding to support these improvements in a fair and transparent process developed with the fire and rescue sector.

The Department will make available total funding of up to £81 million. As a guideline, this will provide up to £1.8 million for each Fire and Rescue Authority in England. Authorities may submit plans for more than £1.8 million if exceptional resilience benefits would result. All Authorities will be invited to send a summary of their plans and these will be reviewed by the Department to ensure that the funding they are providing offers value for taxpayers' money and resilience benefits.

An additional £1.8m (in total) will be available to fund initiatives from the sector that deliver cross-cutting resilience and efficiency benefits. This might include work on developing common technical and procedural standards, for example.

Guidance on the scheme is being circulated to Fire and Rescue Authorities and Services at the same time as publication of this document. The Department is asking for returns by 4 November 2011 but earlier returns can be made for resilience reasons. The Department will not be monitoring individual local projects but will need to oversee delivery with the Fire and Rescue Services and assure resilience outcomes.

The Department and the sector intend to organise a review conference in early 2012 to share experiences and best practice, and identify improvements to national resilience. This might highlight difficulties and how they were overcome – and possibly identify barriers that the Department could help remove.

The Chief Fire Officers' Association and Local Government Association have agreed, in principle, to work with the Department in taking forward the proposals and be part of the oversight process.

Next steps – revised National Framework

Securing national resilience and ensuring public safety against identified national risks is the primary focus of central Government in its ongoing relationship with the Fire and Rescue Services. As announced in the Government response to the sector's *Fire Futures Reports*¹, the recently published *Fire Futures Reports – Government response*², the Department will work with the sector to develop and consult on a new National Framework. This will define national and local resilience roles, including issues arising in the context of cross-border working interoperability, and multi-agency interoperability. Discussions will include considering a national communications capability and standards for data exchange.

Summary of next steps

The next steps that the Department intends to take are summarised in the table below.

Date	Activity
July–November 2011	The Department invites Fire and Rescue Authorities to send a summary of plans and request funding to support resilience and efficiency improvements
July–November 2011	Fire and Rescue Services, Authorities and representative organisations send summaries of any initiatives requiring funding that support national improvements in resilience and efficiency, eg work on common technical and procedural standards
4 November 2011	Final date for receipt of plans
Late 2011	The Department consults on a revised <i>Fire and Rescue Service National Framework</i> , following development work with the sector to define local and national resilience roles
By 31 January 2012	Confirmation of grant funding
Early 2012	Department/Local Government Group/Chief Fire Officers' Association review conference to share experience and best practice, and identify national resilience improvements emerging from local solutions
Ongoing	Separate discussions on use of control centre buildings

¹ See *Fire Futures Reports*. A series of options from the sector for the future of fire and rescue provision in England, December 2010, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/firefuturesforward>

² See *Fire Futures Reports – Government response*. Department for Communities and Local Government, April 2011, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/firefuturesresponse>

Section 2

Background

On 20 December 2010, Fire Minister Bob Neill MP announced the termination of the main IT contract and closure of the FiReControl project. The project began in 2004, following a short consultation, and had aimed to replace England's 46 standalone fire and rescue control rooms with a national network of nine resilient control centres. The contract was terminated because the contractor EADS Defence and Security (now trading as Cassidian) Ltd could not meet the requirements of the project within an acceptable timeframe.

The project was set up largely in response to the unprecedented scale of threat facing the country – both from terrorism (9/11) and from natural disasters such as widespread flooding that were predicted to increase as a result of climate change. It was the third part of the Department's £1bn investment programme in the Fire and Rescue Services alongside New Dimension and Firelink that were already delivering modern equipment, communications and training.

Fire and Rescue Authorities have a statutory duty to respond to emergency fire and rescue calls and mobilise appropriate resources to incidents under the *Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004*. Throughout the project Fire and Rescue Authorities continued to be funded via traditional funding streams to maintain and replace their control room systems in order to fulfil their statutory duty. The FiReControl project was included in the *Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008–11*.

The consultation was conducted according to the Code of Practice on Consultation and was open for 12 weeks running from 13 January 2011 to 8 April 2011.

In order to understand the implications for the fire and rescue sector of closing the FiReControl project, responses to the following questions were sought:

1. **Do you agree with the assessment of FiReControl set out in Section 3 [Lessons from FiReControl]? What lessons do you think we can learn from FiReControl – both positive and negative?**
2. **Are resilience, enhanced technology and efficiency still as important today as they were when the FiReControl project was initiated? If not, what has changed?**

3. **Which aspects of resilience described in Section 4 [*Defining the policy objectives*] are most important for control services? Are there other aspects which are not mentioned here?**
4. **Do you think that there is a role for central government in helping fire and rescue authorities to achieve greater efficiencies in the delivery of control services – and, if so, what should this be?**
5. **Do you think that there is a role for central government in helping fire and rescue authorities to achieve greater efficiencies in the delivery of control services – and, if so, what should this be?**
6. **Which of the approaches (or combination of approaches) for the delivery of control services set out in Section 5 [*Central government support*] would provide the best outcome for the fire and rescue community and the public? Please give reasons for your choice.**
7. **Do you agree that the right funding priorities are set out in Section 6 [*Funding choices*] and do you have any comments on the order in which these are presented?**
8. **Which of the technical options for Firelink [see also Annex C – *Summary of technical options for further use of Firelink*] would best meet fire and rescue service needs? Please give reasons for your choice.**

This document summarises the responses to the consultation and the Department for Communities and Local Government's response to these.

The consultation document can be found at:

www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fireandrescuecontrolservices

Section 3

Outcome of consultation

In total, 61 written responses were received from Fire and Rescue Services, Fire and Rescue Authorities, geographical partnerships of Fire and Rescue Services, representative organisations in the fire and rescue sector, suppliers in the fire and rescue industry, and individuals.

Type of organisation	No. of responses
Fire and Rescue Authority/ Fire and Rescue Service	41
Geographical fire and rescue partnership	3
Representative fire and rescue organisation	4
Supplier from the fire and rescue industry	8
Individuals	5
Total	61

A full list of organisations that responded is shown in Annex A. While the majority of responses were from individual Fire and Rescue Authorities and Services, the main representative organisations also responded – the Local Government Group, the Chief Fire Officers’ Association, the Fire Brigades Union and the Fire Officers’ Association. Three responses came from partnerships of Fire and Rescue Services in different parts of the country – the south east, north west and Thames Valley.

One respondent requested confidentiality of their response, two requested confidentiality of their business cases sent as part of their response and a further one requested that only extracts from their response be published.

A summary of the responses is outlined below, collated under five core themes:

- Lessons from the FiReControl project
- Resilience, technology and efficiency
- Collaboration, common standards and future fire and rescue service plans
- Priorities for available funding
- The future role for central government
- The options for Firelink.

Selected quotations to illustrate the flavour of the responses are provided throughout the text and in Annex B.

Theme 1: Lessons from the FiReControl project

The great majority (29 of the 31 who expressed a view) of the responses agreed broadly with the assessment in the consultation document – four also specifically endorsed the views expressed by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee in their Report of April 2010³. Overarching criticisms focused on the project’s early stages and decisions taken then (24 responses identified these) – its ambition and complexity as well as its imposition by government, governance and lack of the sector’s involvement (33 responses on the last point). Several commented that the project’s scale was disproportionate to the level of risk faced, especially when compared to solutions proposed for the other emergency services at the time – a better balance between resilience, affordability and risk had been needed.

“Despite efforts in recent years to improve communication and engagement, these early problems and decisions continued to damage the long term viability of this project” **Chief Fire Officers’ Association**

“While all Fire and Rescue Authorities agree that there is a need to increase resilience in the control system, we have consistently argued that a centrally-dictated, one size fits all model was not the appropriate way of achieving this.” **Local Government Group**

“There appeared to be a lack of practical user input in developing the specification and an unrealistic level of complexity resulted from a lack of Fire and Rescue Service involvement at an early enough stage.” **Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service**

“We can learn from FiReControl, particularly with regard to the early decision making, the governance arrangements and the need to build greater trust between central government and the fire and rescue community” **Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service**

“such standards were only being applied to fire service control rooms when the threat level to other emergency service control rooms would have been at least as high . . . This leaves the perception that the response within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, as it was at the time, was not proportionate to the threats that were being faced and that the response was not joined up across government.” **London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority**

³ Communities and Local Government Select Committee *FiReControl* Fifth Report HC352 April 2010 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcomloc.htm>

Poor project and risk management was raised in 12 responses. A total of 14 responses pointed out that the project's expected benefits of savings and technical enhancements eroded over time and the system could now be delivered in alternative ways. The delays and the uncertainty the delays caused for the fire and rescue services – and especially control room staff – were a particular issue for some and they felt the 'people factor' had been under-represented in the consultation document.

"The impact that uncertainty around the project has had on staff directly affected should not be underestimated. People working in control rooms, particularly, have been through years of uncertainty regarding their future." **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

"Our principal concern was the welfare of control room staff and making the most of the opportunity, afforded by an extremely lengthy lead-in period, to re-train and redeploy staff prior to changeover. Sadly, the majority of Fire and Rescue Services failed to seize this opportunity and many people were left in a state of uncertainty for a long period of time" **Fire Officers' Association**

Another point made strongly in seven responses was there was too little recognition that FiReControl was not just an IT project but about business change to modernise England's Fire and Rescue Services. Views were mixed on whether the public sector should deliver large-scale IT projects.

"There was an over reliance on, and confidence in, the technological solution, with less focus on the process changes required across a very mature service sector. The sector-wide business process re-engineering that FiReControl needed to succeed was not happening on the ground" **Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority**

"It may in principle be possible for central government to deliver large-scale IT projects in future, but for this to happen the appropriate project governance arrangements should first be established and all relevant partners be involved at the outset. Therefore, we do not agree with the principle that all large-scale IT projects should now be avoided by the public sector ... we would, however, urge greater caution to be exercised in future where such projects are concerned." **Suffolk County Council**

"Technology has developed and continues to do so at such a pace that it is counterproductive to efficiency and effectiveness to embark upon large-scale, national IT projects that have lead-in times of several years." **Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority**

The national, regional and local dimensions

Seven responses expressed the view that the national ‘one size fits all’ was not the right model for achieving resilience, nor indeed for the fire and rescue services. A few (four) suggested, for example, that it was overly ambitious to expect the project to produce standardised ways of working from 46 different operating procedures and to satisfy the needs of 46 autonomous users – it may have been a missed opportunity for reducing this diversity and for harmonisation. However, the progress made through the ‘Ways of Working’ strand of the project was widely praised – specifically mentioned in 15 responses (see below *Positive outcomes from the FiReControl project*).

“The desire to allow each Fire and Rescue Service to maintain their existing mobilising arrangements and procedures made the project virtually unmanageable. The project needed to set out the parameters from the start, that this would be a national system with national operating and mobilising procedures, which would be adopted by all.”

Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service

“The FiReControl project raised awareness of some very basic differences between English fire services, which fundamentally, do the same job. This made inter-service working difficult and often controversial. The project highlighted the fundamental need for consistency between fire services.” **Motorola**

A few suggested a tension between local integrated risk management plans (IRMP) and the national approach of FiReControl. However others still advocated the national approach, similar to FiReControl, but remedying all the lessons learnt.

The regional approach had critics and supporters. The imposed boundaries divided established partners in places and some suggested the lead authority approach would have worked better than local authority controlled companies. Some pointed out that metropolitans, county and combined fire authorities should be grouped together and not mixed – the project had failed to recognise how much they have in common compared to simply grouping geographical neighbours. However others said regional teams worked well and that, following the project closure, they had decided to retain some regional aspects. These highlighted improved collaboration, knowledge and consistency with neighbours as positive outcomes resulting directly from FiReControl.

“There was a tension throughout between the localism of local integrated risk management plans and national prescription FiReControl.” **Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service**

“The regional approach was an impediment in some areas but not all.” **Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service**

“The East Midlands as a region developed and adopted a cohesive governance model that proactively supported the underlying principles of FiReControl. This model has undoubtedly improved communication within the region and has led to the achievement of a range of improvements.” **Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority**

“There were misgivings about the practicality of the Governance arrangements established for the management of the Regional Control Centres through a Local Authority Controlled Company. The structure was complicated by the use of Fire Authority Members from constituent authorities that could, in effect, be holding themselves to account.” **Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service**

Engagement with the fire and rescue services

The lack of involvement and influence of the fire and rescue community – both operational staff and elected members – particularly at the beginning, was a key point made by many (33 responses criticised lack of involvement). They felt this led to a lack of ‘buy in’ and support as well as a missed opportunity in using fire and rescue expertise and experience to understand and specify user requirements at the outset. A few highlighted a lack of understanding of the role of control rooms at the heart of the fire and rescue service operation as well as the wider fire and rescue command and control process. A view then persisted throughout the project that the system might not meet user needs.

There were some areas where improved working relationships were highlighted – including the test and assurance team that participated in the solution establishment workshops.

“Partnership ... was never achieved, possibly due to the lack of departmental experience in managing projects of this nature and staffing issues within the department which was reflected by the reliance on a high level of secondees being released by Fire Authorities to support the project.” **Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service**

“From the outset of FiReControl it was clear that there was a lack of understanding outside the Fire and Rescue Service community of how current control rooms operate and how they integrate within their Fire and Rescue Service.” **Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service**

“Control rooms are at the heart of most Fire and Rescue Services, both physically and metaphorically. They provide the essential link between our communities and our resources, both operational response and prevention services.” **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

“Early engagement would have benefited the project and maybe set out a more deliverable set of expectations and assisted in achieving ‘buy in’ from Fire and Rescue Services.” **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

“It is reassuring that the present Government acknowledges the importance of building strong, supportive relationships with the fire and rescue community. The project was often managed in a way which ignored the advice from the Fire and Rescue Services. This led to frustration, suspicion and anger from the Fire and Rescue Services which was counterproductive to successful implementation of the project.” **County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service**

“In addition, the early creation of a test team of secondees from Fire and Rescue Services, civil servants and professional testers, way before any solution was introduced, was a positive step” **Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service**

The poor relationship between the three main partners – the Department, fire and rescue community, and the main contractor EADS Defence & Security – was cited as an issue in 11 responses.

Three responses commented on the waste of fire and rescue service resources as well as public money during the course of the project.

Management of the project

A total of twelve responses put forward the view that the project and risk management by the national team was poor. Five mentioned a lack of openness and transparency throughout. Several pointed out the difficulties caused by a lack of project plans and timetables, lack of clarity on funding issues and other shortfalls in governance and communications. Some expressed the view that these improved during the project, as did stakeholder management and engagement with the sector.

“At the heart of this is the most important lesson to be learnt and it is associated with project management skills, governance models and the requirement to establish and maintain good communication at all levels.” **Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority**

“Greater openness and transparency would have been achieved if the Fire and Rescue Service had been given a more significant role in the management and decision making processes for the project.” **County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service**

“Poor risk management from the side of the Fire and Rescue Service as many of the project teams were made up of uniformed officers with extensive operational experience, but minimal risk management knowledge” **Individual**

Five responses expressed the view that too many consultants were used – both directly within the national project team and to review and report on the project – with an over-reliance on advice from these consultants instead of advice from the fire and rescue community.

The technical system proposed

There was a variety of comments on the technical solution. The main themes were:

- The solution was overspecified/ underspecified, suffered ‘scope creep’ from the original objectives and would not meet user needs
- The lack of experience of the main contractor – EADS Defence & Security – and the Department in delivery for the fire and rescue sector
- The untried integration and networking of the technology
- The commercial ‘off the shelf’ products requiring too much bespoke development
- The technology became out of date before it was delivered due to the delays and unrealistic initial timescales

- The perception that too many changes were made through change control notes (although, in fact, there were relatively few)
- Delays in delivery by EADS.

"We contend that the suppliers did not research fully how the Fire and Rescue Service currently operates and how those systems/ processes could be used in future to improve efficiency." **Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service**

"It is a matter of fact that one of the main contributory factors to the failure of the FiReControl project was the inability of the main contractor to deliver on time, on specification and on cost. It is however also our view that many of the difficulties experienced throughout the project could have been mitigated by regular and meaningful consultation with Fire and Rescue Services in the early stages of the project." **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

"As seen during this project, and others reliant on an IT solution, much of the technological development (software) was undertaken as the project progressed leading to major delays and setbacks when expected outcomes were found to be unachievable." **Fire Officers' Association**

"The original concept for Firecontrol included use of commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) components to reduce the costs of bespoke items. Clearly this has failed to produce the expected outcome and there should be an acceptance that the cost of providing future solutions may be high due to the need to use bespoke systems." **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

"Due to the continuing delays associated with the project much of the technology became obsolete during the life of the project." **Fire Brigades Union**

A few commented on the adverse effects on progress in the sector of having a single main supplier and welcomed the localist approach going forward as encouraging greater innovation through competition among a diversity of suppliers.

"It is worth noting that there is benefit from encouraging a diversity of technical systems in that suppliers will always be encouraged to continue exploring new technologies in order to stay one step ahead." **Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Authority**

The control centre buildings

Many of those responding (18 in total) commented on the control centre buildings. Views expressed included:

- They were delivered before there was a final business case or any visibility of the main IT system – they should have been commissioned when there was more certainty on the software
- The buildings were overspecified and expensive – for example, why did they need to be self-sufficient with the network providing back-up
- The involvement by local control room staff in the design of some elements was appreciated
- They were delivered on time.

“With regard to the control centre buildings, the construction of these appeared to run very well, with the buildings being completed close to schedule dates. It was disappointing that the technology provision fell far behind the buildings, an issue that has led to the current position.” **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

“Whilst the overarching concept of the project was broadly supported, the buildings appear to have been significantly over specified and are clearly too large. The security arrangements incorporated into the premises appear also to be in excess of the actual requirements.” **North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service**

Positive outcomes from FiReControl

The positive legacy most widely mentioned was the greater collaboration and dialogue between Fire and Rescue Services. This has led, according to some responses, to greater interoperability, improved cross-border operations and a dialogue on sharing practices. The ‘Ways of Working’ strand of the project, developed jointly by the Fire and Rescue Services and the Department, was a valued part of the project according to 15 responses. Based on this workstream, the continuing work on standardised operating procedures and protocols currently being taken forward by the South East Operations Policy and Procedures Group (SEOPAP) was seen as vital by many for the next steps in collaboration and greater interoperability.

Other positive outcomes mentioned included:

- Information and data collection, including the partnership working with other parts of local authorities this led to – for example, the work on the National Land and Property Gazetteer
- The equipment supplied – for example, mobilising equipment in local fire stations, mobile data terminals in fire appliances

- Use of sector experts later in the project – for example, in the solution establishment workshops (SEWs).

“Despite the ultimate failure of the project, much good work was carried out under FiReControl and this must not be lost as it will have value in taking forward new solutions.” **Oxfordshire County Council**

“One benefit of the Firecontrol project that should continue to be supported by Government is the increased collaboration between Fire and Rescue Services. This is mostly intra-regional due to the nature of the project, but the need for resilience may introduce a wider nationwide approach leading to a fuller interoperable emergency fire and rescue service.” **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

“The project did facilitate some excellent collaborative working within the south east, particularly with regards to resilience and interoperability.” **Kent Fire and Rescue Service**

“The development of the core principles associated with data driven ways of working will be of greatest value to the Authority going forward” **Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority**

“The project has compelled Fire and Rescue Services to be more outward looking in identifying best practice and driving change within.” **Humberside Fire and Rescue Service**

“This Authority has been fortunate to receive a number of assets as part of the FiReControl Project and been able to improve a number of areas of service provision. These include new station end equipment, mobile data terminals and officer mobilising technology. All of these will undoubtedly prove to be an integral part of any wide scale improvement plan.” **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

“FiReControl leaves a valuable legacy to the Fire and Rescue Services. The work performed for the project has already delivered benefits to Fire and Rescue Services and care was taken as the project closed to ensure that key data assets, and the opportunity to take on the responsibility for maintenance and use of these, were passed to Fire and Rescue Services in order to extract further value. The collaboration between Fire and Rescue Services and their colleagues in local authorities which FiReControl established, remains in place and is impressive to observe.” **GeoPlace**

Theme 2: Resilience, technology and efficiency

Most responses agreed (54 out of the 58 that commented) that the original objectives of improved resilience, technology and efficiency were at least as important today as they had been at the start of the FiReControl project in 2004. Events since then, such as widespread flooding incidents, had illustrated this and shown up some weaknesses in the current systems.⁴ The need for efficiency had become greater with the current economic situation. The basic principles of the FiReControl project were widely supported – the issue was more the disproportionate response to the threats and the approach taken. A commonly made point was that enhanced technology supported both increased efficiency and improved resilience.

“The Chief Fire Officers’ Association supported the principles behind FiReControl from the outset as this project was to provide a modern, resilient and centrally funded solution for all fire and rescue services”. **Chief Fire Officers’ Association**

“The principles upon which the FiReControl project was founded remain as valid today as they were at the inception of the FiReControl project.” **Thames Valley Partnership**

“Technology is and should be used to support and aid Fire and Rescue Services in delivering the control room service, but only if it can perform to the appropriate level of availability and reliability. The FiReControl project has shown how hard this is to achieve especially when individual Fire and Rescue Services start from such diverse positions.”

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

Several fire and rescue authorities pointed out that they continue to meet their statutory duty in maintaining a resilient and efficient control room.⁵ However there was a fear that the technological gap between the most advanced and least – that would have narrowed under FiReControl – could now widen further.

⁴ *Facing the Challenge – the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser’s review of the operational response by the Fire and Rescue Service to the widespread flooding in England during 2007*, March 2008, Department for Communities and Local Government www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/floodingreview

⁵ *Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004*, section 7(2)(c)

“Most Fire and Rescue Authorities now have the technology that FiReControl aspired to; however without central leadership there is a danger that the differentials that were apparent prior to FiReControl could well reappear.” **Kent Fire and Rescue Service**

“We would also include the use of mobile data and AVLS [automatic vehicle location system] as being highly important to a resilient system; currently a large number of Fire and Rescue Services have no real ability to identify the dynamic location of their operational assets or provide them with effective data to support their role.”

Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service

“There have been few major failures of a fire service control room. Every service has always had its own effective, tried and tested business continuity arrangements to ensure that they can continue to carry out their statutory duty.” **London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority**

“Call handling and mobilising of resources is the key issue. This remains a statutory duty for Fire and Rescue Services and therefore is not necessarily served best by a centralised function; it is one which Fire and Rescue Services have always discharged well and will continue to do so in the future.” **Humberside Fire and Rescue Service**

Number of control rooms

Views were very mixed about the number of control rooms needed and the relationship of this with resilience and efficiency. Points made included:

- With falling numbers of calls and incidents there should be fewer control rooms on efficiency grounds
- Fewer control rooms could lead to less resilience (as a greater risk of single point of failure) and combined control rooms are potentially a greater target for physical and cyber attack
- Larger, shared control rooms give higher resilience and efficiency – for example, through more staff being available and advanced technology more affordable
- Separate but integrated systems are more resilient than one shared system.

“Resilience and efficiency are probably more important than they were when Firecontrol was initiated. The range, number and type of incidents is changing over time – climate change has resulted in large scale flooding in areas of the country not previously affected. The number of incidents attended is reducing as Fire and Rescue Service community initiatives come to fruition and attendances to fire alarm calls are managed” **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

“Most fire controls are not as resilient as they should be – they rely on small numbers of personnel and are frequently being maintained by minimum numbers of crewing.” **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service**

“We do not agree that merging controls delivers the best outcomes in terms of resilience or efficiency for the Fire and Rescue Service or the public.” **Fire Brigades Union**

“the number of combined control rooms looks likely to increase and as such, they will become more legitimate targets for physical and cyber attack aimed at compromising emergency response.” **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

“There is an acceptance that 46 independent control rooms may not deliver the most financially efficient service to the public. It is now the right time to explore alternative methods of delivery including merger and outsourcing” **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

“We recognise that the maintenance of independent sustainable solutions for individual control rooms, such as ours, which handles a relatively small number of incidents per year (circa 9,000) may not be the most efficient solution.” **Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service**

“There is recognition that the number of emergency calls is reducing each year; that the staffing models are typically expensive as people require a high degree of training, and that some Fire and Rescue Services do not have the capacity to keep developing their control room functions. Previous reviews stated that once the number of incidents attended falls below 20,000 a year the control room function becomes less cost-effective. Many Fire and Rescue Services are now attending fewer incidents than this and in business terms it is clear that we need to reduce the number of control rooms across the UK” **South East Fire Improvement Partnership**

A few suggested a revision to the definition of efficiency – currently expressed in terms of volumes of calls handled per operator. They considered that the wider role of control room staff should be recognised in both this definition and elsewhere – for example, in being the public’s first point of contact for help, handling incidents throughout, advising people awaiting rescue and taking on out of scope activities.

“the control room function should not be seen in isolation to the rest of the business – it should be seen as the ‘communications hub’ of the organisation and control staff should be integral to the delivery of all aspects of the service, not just 999.”

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service

“Call handling capability should not be influenced by numbers of calls per operator but by incident types and call duration as this can determine the numbers of operators required to handle calls during certain conditions.”

Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service

“The importance of out of scope work and its affect on Fire and Rescue Services was never clearly understood by central government.”

West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

Resilience and technology

Most fire and rescue authorities cited robust resilient fallback and overload arrangements as the top priority for resilience in their control services. They needed to deal with spate conditions, major incidents and system failure with total loss arrangements for technology, staff, infrastructure and utilities. A few responses expanded on staff loss, highlighting that this could be through industrial action or a health epidemic as well as staff being unable physically to reach the control room. Planning for business continuity and degradation of service were considered vital functions. The sector is required to undertake business continuity planning as part of its duty under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

Interoperability with other Fire and Rescue Services – particularly for data sharing and remote mobilisation – was highlighted as an essential next step in improving resilience by many and developing common standards was believed to be key to this. Four Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities were exploring interoperability with other emergency services.

Physical security was considered less important, although a sensible level of building security was needed.

“The most important aspect of resilience is to improve call handling capability combined with interoperability of communications.” **Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service**

“Without central government leadership and guidance Fire and Rescue Service control rooms could miss the opportunity to develop interoperability and shared platforms between services and regions” **Kent Fire and Rescue Service**

“Interoperability and the need for network solutions for mobilising should still be considered as a top priority for the government as 46 English Fire and Rescue Services ‘doing their own thing’ will just perpetuate the current problems and create a future sustainability issue” **Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

“We believe that the physical security of the building is less critical and the over-engineering of the regional control centres has added significantly to their cost.” **Dorset Fire Authority**

Changes since 2004

In response to the question about the main changes since 2004 – when FiReControl began – the principal themes from the responses were:

- Advances in technology
- The increased importance of efficiency with the need to find savings in the face of budget cuts – although the definition of efficiency in respect of control rooms was questioned (see page 23)
- Increased and more effective working with partners.

Many thought the advances in technology now enabled FiReControl’s objectives to be achieved in alternative ways that are cost effective and resilient. These advances have also eroded the benefits of the technology that the project would have delivered. Three Fire and Rescue Services said they were already using all this advanced technology – but others said they would value having it now. An automatic vehicle location system (AVLS) and upgraded mobile data terminals were mentioned most frequently.

"The current Government's budget reduction plans and the financial pressures being felt by public sector organisations including Fire and Rescue Authorities are obvious signs that the need for improved efficiency is an even higher priority than it was when the FiReControl Project was initiated in 2004." **Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

"Improved technological advances over the lifespan of the project mean that there are alternative options to consider now. Resilience can be enhanced by having suitable arrangements with other Fire and Rescue Services to provide fallback and overload capabilities." **West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service**

"Because of the timescales involved and the pace of technological change, the FiReControl Project failed to keep up that pace, the result being that many services have already exceeded the capabilities that the Project would have delivered." **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

"Avon Fire Authority still remains of the view that advances in technology and efficiency were deliverable via the Airwave and Firelink systems" **Avon Fire and Rescue Service**

Theme 3: Collaboration, common standards and future fire and rescue service plans

A total of 50 of the 61 responses answered the question about their preferred approach to the delivery of fire and rescue control services in the future. Of these 84 per cent (42 responses) supported the approach of greater collaboration – locally determined – with some central government support. A total of 64 per cent (27 responses) of these responses combined the collaborative approach with a requirement for a common set of national standards (technical and/or procedural).

The Fire and Rescue Services in Wales and Scotland were mentioned as examples to follow for collaboration.

Collaboration with not only other Fire and Rescue Services but also other emergency services and local services requiring a 24/7 call handling facility was also suggested.

“For the public, the best outcome in terms of service delivery is almost certainly a national provision, essentially FiReControl. However this will place considerable financial burden on the tax payer, will take considerable time to deliver and is unlikely to receive universal support across the sector. ... Given the work undertaken to support FiReControl there will be few services that cannot see the value of a more integrated approach and it is the view of this Service that change must take place.”

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority

“Leadership and direction is again required but with solutions being decided locally, therefore the directions taken may diverge unless the key messages are very clear and incentives given.” **Surrey Fire and Rescue Service**

“This approach, with Government support, will materialise as a combination of local determination with central funding and support, adhering to national standards owned by the sector.” **Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority**

Common standards

Many of those looking at greater collaboration with other fire and rescue services, short of sharing a control room, saw great resilience benefits in being able to mobilise resources and manage incidents in their ‘buddy’s’ area. Interoperability with common technical and procedural standards and protocols was seen as essential to achieve this. A revised version of GD92 (15 responses mentioned this) and the work on standard operating procedures (SOPs) were mentioned frequently as contributors. The need for national standards for resilience was also mentioned.

The majority of those advocating standards considered they should be sector led although many saw a supporting role for central government (see *Theme 5*).

"History shows that the mere existence of these standards does not necessarily lead to their adoption and for that reason, it is considered that the Department for Communities and Local Government do have a central role in mandating or incentivising the adoption of such standards" **Royal Berkshire Fire Authority**

"We would want to discuss ... the potential need for a standards framework with the likelihood that it would not be mandatory" **Chief Fire Officers' Association**

"To secure resilience between partner/ buddy control rooms it is essential to develop national standards." **Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority**

"the government should determine standard specifications to promote connectivity and interoperability so that different platforms can better integrate and provide more resilience in the future." **Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service**

"National standards across the sector should be agreed within the sector"
Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Authority

"The development of technical standards and standard operating platforms should be led and directed by central government in our view. The risks of disparate local solutions are neither efficient nor effective" **Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority**

"The existence of the standards on their own is not enough, however, and central government support will be essential to promote their adoption." **Oxfordshire County Council**

"The Government could act as a stakeholder in the sign-off of local projects for changes to control room mobilising in order to assess the degrees to which the suggested common standards are being delivered." **Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

"We believe that central Government can play a role in supporting technical enhancements into Fire and Rescue Service control rooms in several ways – through the setting and then maintaining of technical standards/specifications" **Fortek Computers Ltd**

"Government should support the development of national resilience standards and for the technical and operational elements to be led by the Chief Fire Officers Association. Central government funding to the Chief Fire Officers Association to support this work will be vital to achieve the objectives required." **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

Future Fire and Rescue Service plans

The Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities that gave information on their own plans were either actively exploring or had in place greater collaboration in some form. Plans were at widely different stages – from initial exploration to full business case – and included:

- Merging control room services with one or more Fire and Rescue Services or outsourcing their control room service to another Fire and Rescue Service
- Strengthening ‘buddying’ and mutual aid arrangements with neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services
- Setting up ‘buddying’ arrangements with a distant Fire and Rescue Service unlikely to be affected by the same major incident – eg flooding, flu epidemic
- Exploring greater collaboration and sharing services with other local emergency services
- Offering 24/7 emergency call handling services to other local public services requiring this level of service.

A number intended to retain their local standalone control room and were not looking for merging or sharing arrangements with other Fire and Rescue Services although might pursue this option with local emergency services.

Some were exploring innovative, more efficient approaches to staffing such as staff pooling, demand-led and day crewing. A few were looking at ways of outsourcing the control room service through a different business model (ie not to another Fire and Rescue Service), but others were uncomfortable with any type of outsourcing for a function that delivered a statutory duty and provided part of their command and control process.

“Services that choose not to enter into collaborative arrangements should be publicly accountable for their reasons in not doing so” **West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service**

“Humberside Fire and Rescue Service is currently investigating opportunities to provide outsourced functions to other Fire and Rescue Services and other forms of income generation to support control room efficiencies.” **Humberside Fire Authority**

“From 1 April 2011 Hertfordshire was fully networked with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service utilising a buddy system. This facilitates the following: automatic overflow of calls to buddy partner in busy periods, such as spate conditions, large call volumes to an incident; calls handled on behalf of each other and passed utilising inter-cad system. ... Norfolk and Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Services do not have a direct geographical border to each other and there is a good geographical separation between the two. Therefore spate conditions are unlikely to occur at the same time. The buddy system allows more Control Operators to be available to deal with the volume of calls.”

Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

“Our vision for the future of fire control in Dorset is a ‘buddying’ arrangement with one or more neighbouring fire and rescue services. We believe such a model provides the best balance between resilience, efficiency, local management and accountability. Technological solutions which enable a ‘buddying’ arrangement with other fire and rescue services can provide a resilient back up for existing control rooms. ...

A ‘demand-led crewing’ model would have been adopted by the regional control centre and a similar model could be used for fire and rescue control rooms. There is a marked reduction in call levels and workload during night shifts and it would be possible to reduce crewing between certain hours providing there was an alternative (a ‘buddy’) for unexpected spate conditions. It may even be possible for one or two of the control rooms to only be crewed during the day.” **Dorset Fire Authority**

“A number of Fire and Rescue Services have Silver Command Centres, which provide operational resilience linked to their fire control function. ... How this could/would be incorporated into a host outsourced model is not readily apparent to us.”

Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority

“Responsibility for day to day service delivery should then be outsourced wherever possible, in order to drive out further efficiencies ... this Authority believes that a full range of options should then be considered.” **London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority**

Theme 4: Priorities for available funding

The completion of the Firelink project was the clear priority for funding (for 35 out of 43 expressing a view). The primary driver for this was the perceived need to provide a robust bearer for data and more control over voice services so Fire and Rescue Services could better manage and reduce Airwave usage costs. However, timing was an issue. Fire and Rescue Authorities were at different stages of developing and implementing future plans and recognised the benefits of upgrading the interfaces into Airwave only when these plans had been confirmed.

Beyond this, there was no consistency on funding and the responses showed considerable variation in ordering next priorities – there were 20 different combinations given of the four suggested priorities, as well as additional suggestions. This possibly reflects the variety in Fire and Rescue Authorities' own future plans. Suggestions included priority funding for:

- Collaboration
- Transition and restructuring costs
- Development of common standards and their adoption
- Upgrading current systems
- Upgrading accommodation.

“Consideration should be given to supporting those Fire and Rescue Services planning to make significant efficiencies by working with other services. This could include allowing the Fire and Rescue Service involved to use the savings generated by the reduction in Firelink control room equipment needed as well as providing funds for transitional activities. . . . There may be an opportunity to ensure that those Fire and Rescue Services which make savings by working collaboratively have the savings ring-fenced for their activities.” **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

“The Department for Communities and Local Government should meet the full costs for the maintenance and, where necessary, upgrading of existing control room technology where it has become necessary as a result of the cancellation of the FiReControl project.” **Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority**

“If the Department for Communities and Local Government are prescribing a solution, they need to pick up the costs. If there is no prescription, then costs would fall where decisions lie as choice would be for us.” **Devon and Somerset Fire Authority**

“Government should recognise that there are authorities who took decisions with accommodation and infrastructure that were based on the anticipated move to the FiReControl network. This is an important consideration and should be taken into account in determining funding support.” **Suffolk County Council**

“Technological capabilities today are far in advance of those available when the project was first defined, but technological improvement comes at significant cost.” **Humberside Fire Authority**

Some responses pointed out that investment in new systems and accommodation had been postponed in the expectation of FiReControl being delivered, leading to systems needing to be replaced and accommodation upgraded when budgets were most under pressure. Demand on suppliers in the market would also be high. Others acknowledged the continuing funding streams for maintaining and replacing control room equipment and accommodation during the lifetime of the project.

“... many services have not invested in control room technology during the life cycle of the FiReControl project in expectation of a provided solution. The timing of the project closure set against budget reductions will provide services with a significant challenge, and may possibly affect their ability to deliver effective services” **West Midlands Fire Service**

“While we accept that the service has continued to receive funding to maintain existing control rooms during the period of the FiReControl project each service will be in a different position with regard to the viability of existing systems.” **London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority**

“If other Fire and Rescue Services have consciously chosen not to upgrade their mobilising functions for the duration of the [FiReControl] project, the money that they would have spent must remain in reserves or must have been spent on alternative projects” **Surrey County Council**

The Government was urged by many to be flexible in funding arrangements in order to cater for the variations in individual Fire and Rescue Authority plans and the stage they had reached. Some felt that the Government should avoid encouraging ill-thought through plans based on ‘knee jerk’ reactions to the project closure through funding arrangements that favoured early applicants. On the other hand, those that believed their business case was well developed called for the Government to distribute any available funding rapidly.

Nearly all fire and rescue authorities called for clarity on funding as a top priority so they could progress their plans with some certainty. This also included clarity on long-term financial support, beyond the three-year Spending Review period. Some were concerned that the Fire and Rescue Authorities would, in effect, ‘bear’ the legacy costs of the control centre buildings.

"The Local Government Group urges the Government to clarify the amount of central funding that will be made available for upgrading control services as soon as possible to help Fire and Rescue Authorities make an informed decision. We accept that the Department for Communities and Local Government is seeking to achieve a balance between operational need, fairness and value for the tax payer"

Local Government Group

"It is essential that greater clarification is provided in order for Fire and Rescue Authorities to make a more informed judgement when developing their longer-term replacement plans and service delivery strategy."

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority

"Fire and Rescue control rooms should be a key part of resilience arrangements and we consider that these arrangements will not be effective if Fire and Rescue Services feel pressurised to introduce short-term solutions instead of properly thought out and planned long-term arrangements"

Fire Officers' Association

"In general, we are concerned that the level of support available to fire and rescue authorities may be limited because of central government's intentions to mitigate the financial burden associated with the current control centre buildings and the need to complete the Airwave installation."

Suffolk County Council

Theme 5: The future role for central government

The main roles for central government identified among the responses were:

- Providing funding
- Managing the Airwave/ Firelink contract and the completion of Firelink
- Supporting the development and adoption of sector-led national technical and procedural standards, eg the work in the south east and a revised GD92 (see Theme 3)
- Promoting the Direct Electronic Information Transfer (DEIT) protocols being trialled in Wales.
- Defining and implementing national resilience measures
- Taking forward work on multi-agency collaboration and interoperability arrangements in Whitehall between all the emergency services and other key agencies (eg HM Coastguard, Environment Agency)

“Where efficiency is concerned, central government’s role should be focused around policy making and securing the necessary inter-government departmental and inter-Service arrangements needed for the efficient operation of control services and to ensure that responders can operate and communicate effectively together at major incidents. ... Government should provide endorsement of strategic decisions relating to the national interest and ensure that effective cross-governmental and inter-agency arrangements are established.” **Suffolk County Council**

“Another essential role for the Department for Communities and Local Government is ensuring efficient and effective management of the Firelink contract and to continue to deliver the full functionality of this.” **Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service**

Other possible roles

A total of 24 responses suggested that, in future, there should be some form of shared procurement. This could be through framework contracts and agreements (such as ‘Sprint 2’), or call-off contracts for core control room and mobilising products. The aim would be to ensure value for money, economies of scale, and interoperability through incorporating common standards. Another driver mentioned was to speed up and simplify the procurement of key systems. A total of 15 responses suggested a particular role for central government here. This ranged from purchasing discrete equipment (such as station ends), through developing a policy and framework contracts, to urging the marketplace to produce competing systems that comply with national standards.

"The potential role for the government ... could include: identification of potential suppliers to save each Fire and Rescue Service researching them individually; national procurement of high speed data links for cost efficiency and resilience of networks."

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

"Centrally developed procurement frameworks will also ensure economies of scale and standardisation of operating equipment." **Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Service**

"Often Fire and Rescue Authorities cannot gain sufficient leverage over the marketplace to be able to drive down cost and as such many technologies are out of reach. Therefore we must look to Government assistance in this issue" **Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority**

"We believe central government can help the Fire and Rescue Services in a number of ways: ... The use of framework agreements such as 'Sprint 2', managed centrally to speed up and simplify the procurement of command and control systems."

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service

More believed Government had a role in promoting enhanced technology than in supporting work on efficiency – some felt strongly that efficiency was a matter for Fire and Rescue Authorities alone.

"We believe that individual authorities are best placed to achieve efficiencies in the delivery of control services and balance these with the requirements for resilience, the maintenance of performance standards and local needs." **Suffolk County Council**

Among other suggestions of roles for central government, four responses suggested the dissemination of best practice, including through case studies.

"Fire Authorities would benefit from central government involvement in disseminating evidence of best practice (such as sharing of concept on staff modelling utilised in FiReControl project)" **Humberside Fire and Rescue Service**

Theme 6: The options for Firelink

The great majority (83 per cent, 29 responses) who responded and expressed a view (35 responses) on the technical option for Firelink that best met fire and rescue service needs recommended the implementation of a full networked voice and data service to existing control rooms. The next most popular option (4 responses, 11 per cent of those responding) was upgrading the existing Firelink solution to support data. Some suggested reducing costs through sharing an interface between Fire and Rescue Services. The greater levels of collaboration – merging and outsourcing – would also achieve these savings.

“In order to support fire and rescue services develop modern control and communications solutions capable of enhancing resilience and efficiency, it is essential that fully integrated voice and data connections to the Airwave network are made available to every fire and rescue service control centre, at whatever scale may be determined locally.” **Chief Fire Officers’ Association**

“The needs of this Authority will only be met if a full networked voice and data connection to whatever control room solution is agreed as a result of our current scoping and feasibility study. We are content to continue with the interim connection until the new control room solution is introduced.” **Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service**

“Regarding Firelink Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service would see Option 3 as most viable, a full networked voice and data connection into existing control rooms. . . . There is also the option of making key Fire and Rescue Service access hubs to the Airwave network, an approach Lancashire would support.” **Lancashire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority**

“The cost of the SAN-H equipment could be reduced if it is ‘hosted’ by one fire and rescue service for a number of neighbouring services using the networked capability and we would want to investigate whether a shared Incident Command and Control System would also be technically possible. Firelink has much to offer in meeting services’ mobile data strategies, particularly to exploit the potential for data communication and mapping data linked to incident location and operations risk information.” **Dorset Fire Authority**

Section 4

Response from the Department for Communities and Local Government

The Department is grateful to all those who responded to the consultation. While a wide variety of views was expressed, there was a high degree of consensus on some key points, especially around the preferred approach for the future, top priority for funding and lessons learnt from the FiReControl project. Many responses highlighted the early decisions made and approach as the main source of later problems. To remedy issues such as these the Department has taken significant steps in the last few years to improve its project scrutiny, procurement and management skills and processes. In 2007 the Department appointed a Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser to give expert input to policy issues. However many of the lessons highlighted will inform future plans and contribute to improvements in understanding between the Department and fire and rescue sector in future.

The Department has made clear that no solution will be imposed on Fire and Rescue Authorities and this assurance was welcomed. However there is now a clear case for closer collaboration, determined locally, to improve both efficiency and resilience. Enhanced technology can support both aims. Many of those responding identified a positive legacy from the project of improved dialogue and collaboration between Fire and Rescue Services. This will be a sound basis for achieving these efficiency and resilience aims that are also essential to building national resilience through local solutions.

Most of those responding considered that resilience, efficiency and enhanced technology were as important today as in 2004 when the project began. The National Security Strategy (*A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*⁶) sets out the four priority risks of international terrorism, a major accident or natural hazard, hostile attacks upon UK cyber space and an international military crisis. Funding available should be used to support the country's response to these risks as well as locally defined priorities for resilience and efficiency.

One key outcome from the consultation anticipated by those in Fire and Rescue Authorities was how any available funding would be distributed. The preferences expressed and comments made have been carefully assessed and the resulting scheme is set out in the next section (see *Next Steps*). The Department is grateful for the input and co-operation of the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers' Association in developing this way forward.

⁶ A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy Cm 7953, October 2010 www.direct.gov.uk/nss

Out of the 42 responses that preferred the approach of greater collaboration, determined locally, with some government support, a total of 27 wanted this to be combined with the development of common technical and procedural standards – the combination was their top priority. A further two put developing standards as their outright first choice. The funding scheme includes an opportunity for the sector to bid for funding to take forward work on standards. The Department believes this should be sector led but will support the adoption of agreed standards through whatever means appropriate on the advice of the sector.

Two particular routes were suggested for developing data transfer standards in the consultation:

- revision of GD92, a well-established and widely used standard in the sector
- promotion, review and roll-out of the Direct Electronic Information Transfer (DEIT) protocol, currently being trialled in Wales.

The DEIT protocol is intended to enable the emergency responder community to quickly and accurately exchange incident logs with each other. In the trial this is currently allowing information to transfer between Fire and Rescue Services in Wales and independently between the Police Forces in Wales. In the next step the participants will explore whether the National Resilience Extranet can be used as an accessible and secure data hub for emergency responders. The initiative could potentially be used more widely and is being taken forward by the Welsh Government, Welsh Joint Emergency Services Group and Cabinet Office.

This is closely linked to wider cross-Government work on multi-agency interoperability. The objective is to produce operational procedures and guidance to enable effective use of new technologies such as Firelink radio systems and the National Resilience Extranet. This work covers all emergency services and first responders across the country, including Scotland and Wales, and is aimed at ensuring that the emergency services are able to operate effectively together when responding to major incidents. The Department continues to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service is well represented in this and other cross-Government work, based on sector advice.

One route for ensuring the adoption of technical standards suggested in the responses was through procurement arrangements. For example, in 1993 the Government had set up a Framework Agreement with four suppliers of communications equipment to supply Fire and Rescue Services through a call-off arrangement – GD92 formed the core common technical standards within this call-off arrangement. This type of model can be used by suppliers to provide confidence that integration to other fire and rescue equipment can be achieved through standard interfaces. The Department believes that the sector is now best placed to develop procurement models that ensure standards are adopted where necessary, so that the benefits of interoperability and collaborative procurement can be realised.

The future of the Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre was mentioned in a few responses. Its future location is unaffected by FiReControl's closure as the Centre's move to London had already been proposed by the Chief Fire Officers' Association and agreed by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and the Department. However all the anticipated efficiency savings from the move will not now be realised. The Department is working with the London Fire Brigade and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority on future funding and governance issues.

The Government's role in national resilience was discussed in the recent *Fire Futures Reports – Government response*⁷. The Department will be taking forward work, with the sector, on providing clarity on national and local roles in resilience as well as the appropriate assurance mechanism for national resilience. This will be included in the next National Framework.

⁷ *Fire Futures Reports – Government response*, Department for Communities and Local Government, April 2011, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/firefuturesresponse>

Section 5

Next steps

The Department is committed to supporting further enhancements to fire and rescue control and mobilisation arrangements in a way that delivers significant improvements to resilience, security and efficiency. The Department's strategy is to build national resilience through local rather than national solutions as the expertise in command and control processes lies with Fire and Rescue Services. To achieve these aims, the Department intends to make available total funding of up to £81 million. As a guideline, this will provide up to £1.8 million in grant funding for each Fire and Rescue Authority in England. Authorities may submit plans for more than £1.8 million if they are able to demonstrate that exceptional resilience benefits would result.

The Department anticipates that this level of funding should be sufficient to support local plans for collaboration and efforts to improve resilience and efficiency through greater shared use of IT infrastructure and applications. It is further expected that this funding should be sufficient to meet local costs of securing the benefits of enhanced data capability, for example through Firelink.

The Department will review plans for value for money and resilience benefits, taking account of the points made in the consultation responses on resilience priorities. A panel may review these plans when further clarification is needed or some aspect might benefit from expert advice.

There was a strong level of support indicated in the responses to the consultation for central government investment in the development by the sector of common procedural and technical standards. As a result the Department intends to make available an additional £1.8 million in total to fund the sector to deliver the project or projects it considers most valuable in this area. Those in the sector wishing to launch other types of initiative that offer significant national benefits for control service coordination and resilience may also apply for this funding.

Further guidance on the funding and process, drawing on the consultation responses, is being circulated to Fire and Rescue Authorities in parallel with publication of this document. The Department will accept returns up to 4 November. Under this proposal the funding will be made available in financial years 2011/12 and 2012/13.

The Department will not be monitoring individual local projects but will need to oversee delivery with the Fire and Rescue Services and assure resilience outcomes. The Department with the sector intends to organise a review conference in early 2012 to give Fire and

Rescue Authorities and Services an opportunity to share experience, develop and disseminate best practice, and identify improvements to national resilience resulting from local plans. The Department is grateful for input from the Local Government Group and Chief Fire Officers' Association in developing the scheme and for their agreement to being part of the oversight process.

The Department will continue discussions on the future use and funding arrangements for the control centre buildings separately from the funding allocation process.

Fire and rescue partners have been informed of work beginning on a revised *Fire and Rescue Service National Framework*⁸ that will take forward a number of the wider points made in the responses. The Department will work with the sector to develop and consult on the new Framework. This will define national and local resilience roles, including issues arising in the context of cross-border working interoperability and multi-agency interoperability. It is possible that national resilience could, for example, be taken to encompass those functions and resources required to meet the National Risk Assessment that are beyond those properly covered by local Integrated Risk Management Plans.

These might include response and operational guidance, over and above that within mutual aid agreements, for hazards and threats set out in the National Security Strategy, such as:

- Large scale natural disasters (or local with a national impact)
- Events with potential large-scale casualty implications, or requiring large-scale response, or specialist capability – for example, building collapse, aircraft crashes, terrorist activity
- Chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive incidents.

The Department expects to consult on a draft National Framework document in late 2011. If appropriate, the new strategy for control services may be reflected in the Framework.

Any queries on the consultation responses and next steps should be made to:

Public Enquiries:

mary-ann.auckland@communities.gsi.gov.uk
0303 444 3170

Press Enquiries:

Press.office@communities.gsi.gov.uk
0303 444 1201

⁸ See *Fire and Rescue Service Bulletin* 12/2011, July 2011, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/publications/newsletters/>

Annex A

List of respondents

Name of organisation	Type of organisation
1. Private Individual	Private individual
2. Avon Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
3. Private Individual	Private individual
4. Private Individual	Private individual
5. Dorset Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
6. Local Government Association (LGA) – Local Government Group	Representative organisation
7. Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
8. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
9. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
10. London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
11. Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
12. Kent Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
13. Swissphone	Supplier
14. Fortek Computers Ltd	Supplier
15. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
16. West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
17. Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
18. Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service

Name of organisation	Type of organisation
19. Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
20. Humberside Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
21. Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
22. Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
23. West Midlands Fire Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
24. Lancashire Combined Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
25. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
26. North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
27. Motorola	Supplier
28. Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
29. Private individual	Private individual
30. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
31. South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP)	Geographical partnership
32. Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
33. Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA)	Representative organisation
34. Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
35. Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
36. Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
37. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
38. North West Fire Control Ltd	Geographical partnership
39. Ordnance Survey	Supplier

Name of organisation	Type of organisation
40. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
41. Capita	Supplier
42. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
43. Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
44. Private individual	Private individual
45. Fire Brigades Union	Representative organisation
46. Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
47. Devon and Somerset Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
48. Cassidian	Supplier
49. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
50. Thames Valley	Geographical partnership
51. Surrey Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
52. Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
53. Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
54. Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
55. West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
56. Airwave	Supplier
57. Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
58. Fire Officers' Association (FOA)	Representative organisation
59. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
60. East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
61. GeoPlace	Supplier

Annex B

Example quotations to illustrate the flavour of responses

Example quotations are provided, illustrating five of the six main themes:

- Lessons from the FiReControl project
- Resilience, technology and efficiency
- Collaboration, common standards and future fire and rescue service plans
- Priorities for available funding
- The future role for central government.

Theme 1 quotations

Lessons from the FiReControl project

"... there has been a disjoint between the government logic applied to English Fire and Rescue Services and other agencies. There have been no similarly onerous requirements placed on either the police or ambulance services, both of which are at potentially more risk. ... This brought into question the proportionality and cost of the FiReControl solution."

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service

"We are still unsure why this resilience manifested itself into the development of a highly secure system and buildings when other emergency service with potentially a higher threat level continued to work independently in a less secure environment."

Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service

"The Department for Communities and Local Government failed from the outset to engage the service as an equal partner, dictating rather than working on a partnership basis"

Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service

“It must be accepted that the decisions taken in the early days of the project were taken by the Department for Communities and Local Government officials against the advice of the Fire and Rescue Service community”

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority

“A lesson learned for the future would be to facilitate greater sector involvement at an earlier stage and to support fire authority corporate and budget planning processes through timely, open and transparent planning processes.”

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority

“The overall project scope of FiReControl was not properly defined at the start and not enough time was spent involving the fire sector in the early stages of this project.”

Kent Fire and Rescue Service

“Many decisions appeared, to the broader user community, to have been taken by the Department for Communities and Local Government in conjunction with consultants and a small unrepresentative group of users”

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

“We agree ... that it was difficult if not impossible to agree a common approach that satisfied everyone.”

Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service

“Much of the original business case did make strategic sense”

South East Fire Improvement Partnership

“The concept in the main was right but the execution was seriously flawed.”

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority

“Early convergence work proved more difficult than anticipated – and became an unrealisable wish list which had a significant impact on delivery.”

Humberside Fire Authority

“It is recognised that there were varied positions taken by different stakeholders in regard to partnership working and the assessment that partnership working was difficult to achieve is recognised”

Northwest FiReControl

“Early problems were there because of a lack of Fire and Rescue Service involvement and understanding of the Fire and Rescue Service business needs.”

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

“The lack of early engagement with the sector led to a subsequent loss of trust which was not helped by a set of IT early deliverables that failed to meet the user need. ... Overall, engagement with the user community, particularly in the early stages of the project, was lacking, creating resentment and a lack of confidence that the end result would deliver the required capability”

Oxfordshire County Council

“Communications only improved towards the end of the project”

Lancashire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority

“The project did establish a basis upon which to standardise the collection of data and its provision with the service to meet operational needs without geographical boundaries.”

Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service

“During the early stages of the FiReControl project we saw a number of Fire and Rescue Services enthusiastically promoting several of the ideas that emerged, to a point where they saw them as essential requirements in their own mobilising system. These included the adoption of the National Land and Property Gazetteer, attribute mobilising and the capability for collaboration between consenting Fire and Rescue Services”

Fortek Computers Ltd

“Local government’s National Land and Property Gazetteer is now over ten years old and is arguably the most successful e-government initiative in England and Wales. ... This is not a project which is delivered to local government by an external party but an ongoing initiative underpinned by local consensus and continual improvement, and as such avoided problems with restrictive early decision making. This approach was recognised at an early stage by the FiReControl project who engaged unreservedly with the local government community to deliver improvement for mutual benefit. We would like to place on record our thanks to the project for their valued involvement.”

GeoPlace

“There were a number of aspects of the project that we believe were successful and will be carried forward ... examples are that of the approach to ‘ways of working’ adopted within the south east region which is producing common operating procedures and the work to complete business process maps and action plans which will be adapted for use in any future control room services project.”

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority

“The project has increased the understanding of the Fire and Rescue Service in areas such as data security, Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) and command and control systems in general.”

County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service

Theme 2 quotations

Resilience, technology and efficiency

“the three objectives of resilience, enhanced technology and efficiency remain valid but one additional objective should be added: interoperability”

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority

“During the period in which the FiReControl project was running, each of the fire and rescue services within this collaboration have made the essential investments in their control and communications systems to ensure operational continuity and the discharge of statutory functions. We have not however, invested unnecessarily in improvements and enhanced technology where these were promised by the FiReControl project, although a great deal of investment has gone into preparing to integrate systems and data with the Regional Control Centres. This has left us in a strong position on which to move forward but we now face a significant demand for investment in technology in order to improve the resilience and capability of our control services.”

Thames Valley Area

“We understand that the Fire and Rescue Services call rate has reduced significantly since that time through active education programmes and community safety work and that, by instigating a range of challenge processes, the number of incidents attended has also dropped over this period.”

Capita

“Firecontrol was revolutionary in approach, as it looked to improve the response services in many areas. Fire and Rescue Services viewed all the improvement in call taking, prioritisation of incidents, attribute-based mobilising, Automatic Vehicle Location System, Mobile Data Terminal software and fallback facilities favourably. Those Fire and Rescue Services looking to replace systems due to Firecontrol project closure will probably look to incorporate many of the facilities.”

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service

Theme 3 quotations

Collaboration, common standards and future fire and rescue service plans

“The development and maintenance of standards of technology or protocols would be a major role for central government”

Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service

“We are considering demand based crewing across the three Fire and Rescue Services [Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset] and the possibility that one or more of the controls will be day crewed.”

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service

Theme 4 quotations

Priorities for available funding

“We believe that the cost of integrating the control room into our new service headquarters should be met from central government ... we believe the costs of the upgrade [to the fire control system] and for the associated telephony hardware and software should be met by central government.”

Dorset Fire and Rescue Authority

Theme 5 quotations

The future role for central government

“Central government involvement would be needed to facilitate or lead on the identification of efficiencies across individual Fire and Rescue Services boundaries. Without central direction, we doubt that fire and rescue authorities and their Fire and Rescue Services will look beyond their local span of control when attempting to identify efficiencies.”

Fire Officers' Association

“Government should not be involved in the procurement or management of the IT aspects of any future proposals”

Lancashire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority

“There remains a role for the Department for Communities and Local Government on developing common specifications to support the procurement process and to facilitate interoperability and connectivity.”

Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service

“implementing a national minimum standard of staffing across all brigades”

Fire Brigades Union

DRAFT

**WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT
(Tuesday 5 July 2011)**

Fire and rescue control services (England)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local

Government (Robert Neill): Today the Government is publishing its response to the consultation on the future of fire and rescue control services in England announced in my statement to the House of 13 January 2011 [col 22WS]. This followed the closure of the FiReControl project in December 2010.

First I would like to thank all those who responded to the consultation – the Department received 61 responses, including from most Fire and Rescue Authorities and Services, by the closing date of 8 April. The great majority of those responding to the consultation believed that improved resilience and efficiency – and the enhanced technology needed to support these – were as important today as when FiReControl began in 2004. Most responding also agreed with the Government's preferred approach of achieving these objectives now through encouraging increased collaboration – in a locally-determined manner – with some Government support. This approach will deliver efficiency and resilience benefits for Fire and Rescue Authorities in the best way for their area, as well as build national resilience through local solutions.

I am announcing today that the Government is making available £81 million for Fire and Rescue Authorities in England to improve the resilience, efficiency and technology in their control services. As a guideline, this will provide up to £1.8 million for each Authority. Authorities will be invited to submit their plans by 4 November 2011. The plans will be assessed for value for taxpayers' money and resilience improvements.

In addition, a further £1.8 million will be made available to the fire and rescue sector for initiatives likely to deliver co-ordination and resilience improvements across the Fire and Rescue Services, such as the development of common

I am very grateful to the Local Government Group and the Chief Fire Officers' Association for their co-operation in developing this proposal. They have agreed to be part of the oversight process. Today I will be circulating further guidance, together with a copy of the response document, to all Chairs of Fire and Rescue Authorities and Chief Fire Officers. A copy of the response document will be available on the Department for Communities and Local Government website. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.



Bob Neill MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State

Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU

Tel: 020 7944 3430
Fax: 020 7944 3986
E-Mail: bob.neill@communities.gsi.gov.uk

www.communities.gov.uk

5 July 2011

To: Chairs of Fire and Rescue Authorities
Cc: Chief Fire Officers

Dear Colleague

Future Fire Control Services Scheme

Further to my letter of 13 June, I am now able to send you our formal response document and details of our next steps following the consultation. I am also sending the text of the Written Ministerial Statement laid in the House today.

In my previous letter I summarised some of the main areas of consensus emerging from the consultation responses and we have taken these on board in developing our approach and the guidance. As a result, I am making available £81m for improving the resilience, efficiency and technology in England's control services. As a guide, this will provide up to £1.8m for each Fire and Rescue Authority. Authorities may submit plans for more than this if exceptional resilience benefits would result. However the total funding cannot exceed £81m. We are requesting plans to be submitted by 4 November 2011.

This funding should be sufficient to meet local costs of securing the benefits of enhanced data capability, for example through Firelink. However, through collaboration, further enhancements could be delivered.

An additional £1.8m in total will be available to the sector as a whole – this could be groups or representative organisations – to develop initiatives of national benefit. The development of common technical and procedural standards would be an example.

As the guidance I am sending with this letter indicates, we are inviting Fire and Rescue Authorities to send us a brief summary of their plans for the funding. These will be assessed to ensure they provide value for money and resilience improvements.

I am very grateful to the Local Government Group and the Chief Fire Officers' Association for their co-operation in drawing up this proposal. They have further agreed to be part of

the oversight process and we are intending, jointly, to organise a review conference in early 2012, to which you will be invited. This will be an opportunity to discuss experiences and progress, share good practice and identify national resilience benefits.

Our strategy is to develop national resilience through local rather than national solutions, building on the expertise of Fire and Rescue Services. I look forward to hearing about your plans and working with you in future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Neill', with a large, stylized initial 'B' and a long, sweeping tail.

BOB NEILL MP
Minister for the Fire and Rescue Service



Guidance to Fire and Rescue Authorities seeking central support for improving the resilience and efficiency of their control service.

05 July 2011

1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) intending to request funding (up to £1.8 million) to improve resilience, efficiency and security in their call handling and mobilisation service and increase collaboration between their service and others.

2. Context

The response to *the consultation on the Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England* published on 5th July 2011 announced the Department's intention to provide funding to support locally delivered improvements to the resilience, efficiency and security of fire and rescue control services in England. The Department expects that greater collaboration between Fire and Rescue Authorities and the enhancement of control room technology will deliver significant improvements in national resilience. In addition it announced that funding would be available to support sector-led, national initiatives that deliver resilience and efficiency benefits for Fire and Rescue Services across the country. This funding may support initiatives leading to the development of common standards and protocols which enhance interoperability through common technical and/or procedural standards or for other schemes offering significant national benefits for control service coordination and resilience. These two separate grants are referred to as the control service **Resilience and Efficiency Grant** and the **Interoperability Grant**. The key features of these grants are summarised below:

Resilience and Efficiency Grant

- The purpose of this grant funding stream is to support local enhancements to control services which deliver efficiency and resilience improvements, and lead to greater collaboration between Fire and Rescue Services in the delivery of their control and mobilisation service.
- Guidelines which are drawn from the consultation feedback and are intended to support FRAs in drawing up their plans are set out in Annex A.
- The indicative level of funding available for each FRA is £1.8m. Funding is expected to be paid in 2011/12 and 2012/13 and will contain a mixture of capital and revenue grant.
- In advance of funding being provided FRAs would be requested to provide bids of around 2 to 3 pages outlining their plans including the expected costs, and the expected resilience and efficiency benefits, with sufficient information to support an assessment of the value for money of the local plans
- Bids may exceed £1.8m where some additional level of support is considered to offer the opportunity for significantly improved benefits and deliver value for money. The total amount of funding available for all Fire and Rescue Authorities, however, cannot exceed £81 million. Any bids which exceed £1.8m cannot be considered until all other FRA bids have been reviewed.

- The Department expects to fund the plans outlined in FRAs' bids in full, subject to the value for money assessment and the overall affordability constraint.
- The Department may request that representatives from CFOA and LGA review the local plans. Their role will be to seek further clarification, offer additional technical support or expertise and help to ensure that FRA plans are aligned with wider resilience objectives.
- FRAs interested in receiving a grant are requested to provide bids by 4th November 2011¹
- In exceptional circumstances the Department may consider bids before the 4th November deadline but will not be able to provide any funding above the indicative maximum of £1.8m²
- It is expected that grant funding will be confirmed by 31 January 2012
- Bids should be submitted to Alan O' Loughlin (alan.o'loughlin@communities.gsi.gov.uk, tel: 0303 444 2859)

Interoperability Grant

- The purpose of this funding is to support sector led development of technical and/or operational standards which support FRS interoperability – or to support other schemes that offer significant benefits for control service coordination and resilience across the country.
- The total amount of grant available is £1.8m.
- FRAs, consortia of FRAs, and sector organisations such as the Chief Fire Officers' Association and Local Government Group are eligible to submit applications for this funding.
- Funding will be available in 2011/12 and 2012/13. Requests for funding for both years should be made by 04th November 2011.
- Applications should be submitted to Alan O'Loughlin (alan.o'loughlin@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

3. Resilience and Efficiency Grant - Information required

This process has been designed to keep to a minimum the administrative and management burden on Fire and Rescue Authorities and the sector whilst providing sufficient information to ensure that grant funding provided represents good value for money and contributes to national resilience improvements.

Annex B provides a simple template for Resilience and Efficiency Grant bids and in summary these should set out:

- An explanation of the local plans for improvements to control service arrangements.

¹ DCLG will take forward discussions with FRAs on proposals which involve use of the control centre buildings separately. This is for commercial reasons and to ensure discussions already underway can proceed without unnecessary delay. FRAs which fall into this category have the same level of financial support available (up to £1.8m per FRA) although there is expected to be further implementation and ongoing financial support available to meet net additional costs arising from the use of these assets.

² Any other fire and rescue authorities that, due to resilience reasons, require an earlier decision should contact Alan O'Loughlin (alan.o'loughlin@communities.gsi.gov.uk) to discuss whether it is possible to submit an earlier return. Bids which exceed £1.8m can not be reviewed until all other FRA bids have been received and reviewed.

- The expected costs, split by capital and revenue.
- The expected resilience and/or efficiency benefits (Annex A contains examples of expected outcomes arising from the investment)
- An assessment of any risks and dependencies that could impede successful delivery of the benefits

4. Interoperability Grant – information required

Whilst there is no set format for applications for this funding it is expected as a minimum that an application would include the following:

- A summary of the scheme/initiative
- The expected costs
- The expected benefits
- An assessment of any risks and dependencies that could impede successful delivery of the benefits

5. Resilience and efficiency grant Q&A

a) What is the maximum grant an individual FRA can receive?

The indicative maximum grant any single FRA is expected to receive is £1.8 million. Bids may exceed £1.8m where some additional level of support is considered to offer the opportunity for significantly improved benefits and value for money.

b) Who is eligible for funding?

Any FRA operating a control and mobilisation service in England is eligible to request funding, either as part of a consortium of FRA's or a standalone Authority.

c) We are intending to submit a return as part of a consortium, should we submit one summary together or cross reference our partner FRA(s) in our own separate return?

Consortia need only submit one bid.

d) How will distribution of funding be managed under a consortium arrangement?

DCLG's preference would be for consortium funding to be provided to one, locally nominated lead authority. If consortium members wish funding to be provided to individual authorities they should indicate the percentage split.

e) What if we underestimate the costs and require additional funding to complete the necessary improvements?

No commitment can be made at this stage that additional funding will be available. Fire and Rescue Authorities should attempt to ensure that their bids are based upon as comprehensive and accurate a breakdown of their expected costs as possible. It should be noted that the Department cannot provide funding for contingency.

f) What happens if operating costs increase (eg IT service fees) as a result of changes and improvements made to control services – would this be treated as a new burden?

No, this would not be a new burden. FRA's should consider any potential increases to operating costs arising as a result of any investment and plan to meet this from their own budgets.

g) How will funding be provided by the Department?

We anticipate that grant funding will be provided to FRAs as a lump sum in each of the relevant financial years (2011/12 and 2012/13).

h) Can we meet with DCLG to discuss a return in advance of submission?

Yes. Please contact Alan O'Loughlin to arrange this (alan.o'loughlin@communities.gsi.gov.uk)

Annex A Resilience and Efficiency Outcomes

The following expected outcomes have been informed by responses to the consultation and are intended to support fire and rescue services in drawing up their plans. This list is not intended to be exhaustive nor prescriptive.

Efficiency

- 1) the financial efficiency of the control service is improved. *For example, the proposed change leads to a reduction in the overall cost per emergency call handled?*
- 2) improvements in the operational efficiency of the control service are achieved. *For example, the proposed change leads to a reduction in call handling and mobilisation times?*
- 3) local plans requiring investment in the control service represent value for money in the long term and have been considered in the light of broader FRA planning considerations. *For example, investment in improvements to a control room where future plans for collaboration are not yet clear, may not represent value for money.*

Resilience

- 4) data centric mobilisation benefits are secured and/or enhanced. *For example through upgrading of control room infrastructure to support data mobilisation and messaging.*
- 5) call handling capacity during sudden peaks in call volume improves. *For example through improved arrangements with a buddy FRS/organisation.*
- 6) remote (ie cross border) call handling and mobilisation arrangements are improved. *For example through improved interoperability and technology links with a buddy FRS*
- 7) remote incident management arrangements are improved. *For example through adoption of common ways of working/operating procedures with a buddy FRS/neighbouring FRS.*
- 8) improvements to physical and protective security are delivered. *For example through improvements to areas such as data security or to ensure accommodation remains operational and available during periods when mains services are unavailable.*
- 9) plans contribute to improvements in national resilience. *For example, through better co-ordination with a number of other fire and rescue services and/or other emergency services enabling an improved response to a major incident.*
- 10) plans contribute to improvements in local resilience. *For example through strengthening Section 13 and 16 arrangements, introducing more flexible staffing models and strengthening fallback arrangements*

Control Service Resilience and Efficiency Grant - Bid Template

Authority name(s):

Date:

1. Summary of local plans

Please outline local plans for improvements to control and mobilisation service.

2. Expected costs

Please identify capital and revenue costs separately.

3. Expected benefits

Please identify key resilience and efficiency benefits, where possible benefits should be quantified. Reference to the expected outcomes identified in Annex A to the guidance should be included.

4. Assessment of risks and dependencies

5. Contact name and details

Minutes of the Meeting of the

EAST MIDLANDS FIRE FORUM

Held: Friday, 8th July 2011 at 2.00 pm
at Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service Headquarters,
Moulton Way, Moulton, Northampton, NN3 6XJ

P R E S E N T:

Northamptonshire County Council

CFO Martyn Emberson
Councillor André González De Savage (Chairman)

Derbyshire Fire Authority

CFO Sean Frayne
Councillor David Wilson

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority

CFO Dave Webb
Councillor Peter Roffey

Lincolnshire County Council

CFO Dave Ramscar
Councillor Peter Robinson

Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham Fire Authority

CFO Frank Swann
Councillor Darrell Pulk

Minutes

Mia Thomas, Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

Cllr Gonzalez De Savage (Chairman) opened the meeting by giving a brief update on a partnership working opportunity that Northamptonshire FRS is currently exploring through a strategic alliance with Warwickshire FRS, designed to improve mutual resilience. CFO Emberson emphasised that this would not be a combination and there would be no work around identity, however, the intention is to have a joint Board to run joint services. The concept of a strategic alliance is currently confidential and will be going to Cabinet later this year for approval. This proposal will not become public knowledge until 15th July, and Northamptonshire FRS staff will be made aware at

lunchtime on 14th July.

A discussion then followed over whether, in light of the above, additional representatives from Warwickshire should be included in the East Midlands Fire Forum.

Resolved:

It was agreed that it was a matter for individual authorities whom they chose to work with but it was not considered appropriate to include representatives from those organisations as standing members of the Fire Forum at this time.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING / MATTERS ARISING

Item 1 – Cllr Roffey asked if there was any update on the financial close down of the accounts for the RMB / LACC.

Action:

CFO Webb will raise the matter with Trevor Peel and report back to the next meeting.

Resolved:

The minutes were agreed as a true and accurate record of the meeting of 7th April 2011.

3. EAST MIDLANDS FIRE FORUM CONSTITUTION

CFO Swann talked through his paper. He commented that item 6.2 of the paper, which refers to the requirement for reports to be circulated to the Forum members at least two weeks prior to the meeting, needs to be amended to one week to bring it into line with normally accepted practice. CFO Emberson also noted that the constitution would enable representatives from Warwickshire to be included in the Forum if required, in relation to specific issues.

It was agreed to change the word “forum”, in paragraph 2.3, to “fora”.

Resolved:

Subject to the amendments noted above, the constitution was duly adopted and accepted by all parties.

4. MEMBER NOMINATIONS FOR REPRESENTATION ON EAST MIDLANDS COUNCILS

Representatives from the Forum have been invited to contribute to the East Midlands Councils and the East Midlands RIEP. There are 2 seats for elected members on the EM councils and the meetings take place quarterly in Melton Mowbray.

Resolved:

It was agreed that Cllr Roffey would represent the Forum at the RIEP and Cllrs Robinson and Pulk would take the 2 seats on the East Midland Councils.

DRAFT

5. INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS OPTIONS

The report from CFO Swann presented various options for consideration by the individual Services.

Northamptonshire and Leicestershire stated that although they recognised the skills of the individual, they would prefer to buy in if needed. CFO Frayne and CFO Ramscar have both used this individual to positive effect and stated that they would be happy to buy in on the understanding that there would be a review after a year.

Resolved:

It was agreed that Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire and Derbyshire would utilise the resource and buy in to the tune of £17.5k each. Northamptonshire and Leicestershire will contribute if the services are required.

6. REPORT ON FIRE INVESTIGATION IN THE REGION

CFO Frayne talked through his report and the various options for consideration by each CFO and Chair. 4 Services are involved in a collaborative approach at a cost of £10K per Service, Northamptonshire which has 2 Fire Investigation dogs would be able to buy in if needs be. CFO Emberson stated that he would be happy to agree a fee rate, in line with the report, for anyone wishing to make use of these resources and confirmed that NFRS is keen to work collaboratively in this regard.

Resolved:

It was agreed that there was no need for this item to come back to the Forum.

7. DCLG FUNDING OFFER FOR FIRE CONTROL SYSTEMS

A circular has been received from the Fire Minister which states that £1.8 million is to be allocated to each Service in respect of funding for Fire Control systems and the deadline for applications is 4th November 2011.

A discussion needs to take place at officer level within each Service and collectively as a region, to determine whether the money should be spent regionally or individually.

The five regional CFOs recently visited EADS where they spent 2 very enlightening days and were afforded the opportunity to explore an architectural approach to IT infrastructure. A 2 day free workshop had been offered by EADS in order to identify future requirements. There would be no commitment for this and it would take place prior to the start of any procurement process. It was noted that the purpose was not to look for systems or bids but to examine the various options on

offer.

The matter of the RCC buildings will form a separate piece of work. It was noted that none of the 5 East Midlands brigades would consider moving into the RCC building on their own, this would require a combined approach.

Cllr Gonzalez De Savage asked whether any brigades had considered a collaboration with the police. A discussion followed and it was felt that governance could be a big issue and there would be insufficient time to resolve this prior to the 4th November. There is also believed to be no common platform for ways of working and the only saving might be on building costs.

It was noted that the £1.8 million for each brigade comes with a few strings attached as there are on-going revenue costs around data services for Firelink to be taken into consideration. Collaboration will be key as it has been intimated by Eric Pickles that those who collaborate will get more funding and there is a wealth of technical opportunity available which is far broader than just Control.

Action:

An update will be brought back to the next meeting by all Forum members, which will then leave 4 weeks until the closing date for applications on 4th November. It was agreed that it would be crucial that whatever commitment is made is absolute.

Darrell Pulk gave his apologies and left the meeting at 3.00pm.

8. EM RIEP

Cllr Roffey attended yesterday's meeting of the RIEP where 20 applications for funding were considered including the one for Aggresso. The scoring system meant that the Aggresso application had been marked poorly.

Action:

It was agreed that CFO Swann would find out what needed to be submitted so that the relevant evidence could be provided to conform with the scoring system.

9. CFA'S PROGRESS WITH AGGRESSO SYSTEM

Aggresso, which is the finance replacement system that has been implemented by Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire, is up and running successfully and offers good resilience. The costs were covered through the RMB and the project has now closed down.

Resolved:

As this project has closed, there will be no further updates to the Forum.

10. STANDARDS REGIME

Cllr Wilson talked through his paper, a copy of which is provided with these minutes.

With the enactment of the Localism Bill, the Standards Board will be abolished leaving the responsibility with the Fire Authorities. Cllr Wilson therefore suggested having a joint Standards Committee with a representative from each County and a common code of standards. It was noted that Derbyshire would be willing to take the lead on these proposals.

Resolved:

It was agreed that a meeting would be arranged for the 3 monitoring officers of the CFAs to discuss this and an update would be provided at the next meeting of the Forum.

11. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 28 September 2011, at 2.00pm at Derbyshire FRS HQ

Minutes of the meeting held on
8th July 2011

5 pages

Signed:

Date: