

MEETING: 23rd NOVEMBER 2009

SUBJECT: REGIONAL FIRE CONTROL - UPDATE

JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, FINANCE OFFICER AND THE CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report updates Members in respect of progress with the FiReControl project and highlights the recent position statement issued by the Local Government Association's Fire Services Management Committee regarding the project.

2 LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION ANNOUNCEMENT IN RESPECT OF THE FiReCONTROL PROJECT

- 2.1 Members are advised that on Friday 18th September 2009 the Local Government Association (LGA) Fire Services Management Committee met to discuss their position on FiReControl following the appointment of their new Chairperson (Brian Coleman, Chair of London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority) and a number of new members. The outcome of their discussion was a vote in favour of the following motion:

"The Fire Services Management Committee is against the principle of the implementation of Regional Control Centres however will continue to engage with CLG to ensure FRAs are properly resourced, will afford effective oversight and review the programme regularly on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Authorities and will continue to promote good industrial relations where applicable and asks LGA officers to develop alternative options in the event of project failure, to be brought back to the Fire Services Management Committee at a future date."

- 2.2 This represents a noticeable change in the position held by the LGA who were previously broadly supportive of the project. It is too early to say what affect, if any, this policy change will have and the Chief Fire Officer will continue to monitor developments in respect of this project with any changes subject to further reports.

3 RECENT PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS

- 3.1 Sound progress continues to be made at the local level and joint consultation with representative bodies, fire and rescue authorities and the Local Authority Controlled Company underpins that progress. Specific areas are highlighted below:

- 3.1.1 Legacy Systems** – Concerns were raised with CLG regarding the position with existing control room equipment following the rescheduling announcement. CLG stated the position remains unchanged from the statement made following

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the previous rescheduling announcement made in November 2008. In essence, CLG are not prepared to fund the replacement of legacy systems through the New Burdens framework where this work includes the full replacement or extension of maintenance arrangements to cover the extended time period. However, where costs can be demonstrated for new and/or higher infrastructure support as a direct result of the rescheduling, then submissions would be considered on a case-by-case basis.

With regard to the technical infrastructure that forms an integral part of this service's mobilising and incident command system, the Chief Fire Officer is of the view that the recent re-scheduling of the project will not adversely effect the provision of service as action had previously been taken to ensure continuation of the system until 2013.

3.1.2 Staff Consultation - Staff consultation workshops were concluded in May 2009 and information from those workshops has informed the regional consultative framework. Frequently asked questions (FAQ) resulting from the workshops have been collated and circulated with answers to staff. The Regional Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) has met on six occasions and is maintaining the collaborative approach to delivering the project. Whilst staff shift patterns at the RCC continue to be a subject of debate, both regionally and nationally, other areas such as diversity and equality policies, staff facilities and health, safety and welfare policies have been agreed. The policy review group is also making good progress producing policy and setting the direction for the LACC.

Individual staff discussions originally planned for July and August 2009 have been postponed at the request of the representative bodies until consultation on matters such as shift patterns can be concluded.

The Fire Brigade's Union (FBU) has a published position with regard to the LACC of:

- No compulsory redundancies
- LACC to recognise the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire and Rescue Services; and
- The Terms and Conditions of all staff, existing and future new starters, to be governed by the current Scheme of Conditions of Service (Grey Book).

Each fire and rescue authority in the region has now been approached by the FBU requesting confirmation of the above. Under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) these matters are clearly the responsibility of the LACC and the Project Board has given the FBU assurances that these matters will be considered at the appropriate time. Nevertheless, this remains a risk to the project.

3.1.3 Transfer Strategy – Critical to the success of the project is the requirement to transfer existing control room staff to the LACC under TUPE. Consultations on options for transfer are currently taking place between the four North East Fire and Rescue Authorities and the LACC. It is envisaged that a decision on a transfer strategy will be required in the first half of 2010.

- 3.1.4 **Finance Issues** - On 19 June 2009 CLG published Fire and Rescue Service Circular 35/2009 which provided information regarding the funding for financial year 2009/10. The Circular states project funding has been revised to provide £22,539,430 as the initial allocation for FiReControl implementation. The revised funding to be provided primarily reflects costs borne prior to cut-over and to that end the North East is to receive £644,517 which includes funds for LACC staffing, accommodation, service fees and a project costs leading to cut-over. The indicative baseline figure for 2010/11 has been revised and increased by 2.7%.

4 FIRELINK UPDATE

- 4.1 Phase B of the provision of the Firelink radio solution to the Authority has now been successfully concluded, with the exception of the fire boat. Due to the fact that the fire boat is open to the elements the radio provided to other appliances would not be suitable and Officers are working closely with the providers to find an acceptable solution it is envisaged that will be brought to a conclusion in the near future.

5 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no Equality and Diversity implications associated with the specific content of this report.

6 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no Health and Safety implications in respect of this report.

7 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 A risk register is maintained in respect of the project and it is updated on a regular basis. As will be apparent from the content of this report there are risks associated with the project but at present they do not threaten actual local service delivery at this stage. Nevertheless the project will be kept under regular by the Chief Fire Officer.

8 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are potential financial implications associated with the content of this report as outlined above and the Chief Fire Officer continues to monitor the financial impact of the FiReControl project and the impact on this Authority. In mitigation of the reschedule announcement the Minister has released additional funding to meet the ongoing costs resulting from the re-profiling of the project.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 The Authority is requested to:
- a) Consider and comment upon the content of the report, and

- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

The under mentioned Background Papers refer to the subject matter of this report;

- Ministerial Announcement 15th July 2009
- Fire and Rescue Service Circular 35/2009
- Fire and Rescue Service Circular 54/2009
- LGA Press Announcement 18th September 2009