

MEETING: 20 SEPTEMBER 2010

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 provides Members with an update in respect of recent developments in the FiReControl project and the Regional Control Centre (RCC) in the North East.

2 RECENT PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS

2.1 Project timescales and deliverables

- 2.2.1 As Members will recall, the Fire Minister Bob Neill MP gave his first major speech at the Fire and Rescue Conference in Harrogate on 29 June 2010 on fire and resilience policy.
- 2.2.2 With regard to the FiReControl project the Minister's speech focused on three key principles for contract delivery, namely that EADS were responsible for delivering the main system on time, to cost and to the quality standard expected by the Fire and Rescue Service. The Minister stated that EADS must honour their commitment to delivering the main system, fulfilling the promise to fire and rescue services to provide a system that is at least as good as they currently enjoy if not better.
- 2.2.3 As a result of the Minister's speech and his clarity around the delivery of the system, Communities and Local Government (CLG) undertook a full review of the project to determine how and when delivery and go-live could be met. As a result, CLG have, in essence, now de-coupled the implementation of the FiReControl system from the go-live of any fire and rescue service. This essentially allows the development and implementation of the hardware and software required to enable an efficient and effective call handling and command and control system to be completed within the timescales set out by the Minister. Indeed a major milestone has now been activated by CLG which requires the completed system to be in place and successfully tested by June 2011.
- 2.2.4 As a consequence of this, CLG have assured authorities that no fire and rescue service will have to go-live before July 2011.
- 2.2.5 During August 2010, CLG undertook some outline research to try to ascertain the earliest possible date that the first wave regions and more specifically, the first batch fire and rescue authorities (of which Tyne and Wear is one) could realistically migrate command and control into the RCCs and therefore go-live. It was apparent by these approaches that the intention was to get three fire and

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rescue services live as soon after the June 2011 date as possible. However, the Chief Fire Officer considers that this represents an unacceptable risk to the Authority as there is no clarity regarding the contract EADS are delivering against and therefore no visibility as to the 'final' system EADS will supply. Indeed there are a number of questions outstanding such as the ability to mobilise officers, the ability to mobilise retained staff and the status of mobile data terminals and this list is not exhaustive. In view of the risks involved, it has not been possible to enter into meaningful dialogue with CLG and therefore no go-live date for the first wave currently exists.

- 2.2.7 Since the Minister's speech the working relationship between CLG and the main contractor EADS appears to have become difficult and is leading to considerable uncertainty and confusion around the delivery of this project. However, the regional and local teams are continuing to delivery what has been requested to the best of their abilities.
- 2.2.8 Support for the project has always been based upon the functionality and performance of the system being better than, or at least as good as the Authority's current command and control system. There is a potential risk emerging that the fire and service may be asked to accept a system that does not have the full functionality that was originally expected, with the intention being to provide that functionality at a latter date. The Chief Fire Officer considers that this is not acceptable. Any system that is finally delivered must have the full functionality and performance promised prior to any cut-over by this Authority.

2.3 Contractual Agreements between Local Authority Controlled Companies (LACC) and Communities and Local Government (CLG)

- 2.3.1 The above documents are currently being considered in detail by Sunderland Council's Legal Department, but it is anticipated there will be little room for negotiation of the terms of the contracts between the LACC and the individual fire authorities, since these will of necessity, need to reflect the arrangements that central government imposes upon the LACC.

2.4 Primary Mobilising and Resource Management System - Concerns regarding EADS Quality Assurance and Testing Process

- 2.4.1 Members will recall that during the autumn of 2009 CLG announced that the main system contractor, EADS, had appointed Intergraph as the suppliers of the Mobilising and Resource Management System (MARMS) and terminated their existing contract with the original supplier, Ericsson.
- 2.4.2 The MARMS is the critical element within the overall project, for without such a fully functioning system the operations at RCC will not be able to commence. The lack of demonstrable progress in this area since the announcement of a new sub-contractor is impacting in all key areas of the project nationally and regionally.

- 2.4.3 The Chief Fire Officer also continues to have concerns with regard to the assurance and testing of the MARMS. Reports presented to the FiReControl Local and Regional Delivery Group and the FiReControl Project Assurance Board indicate that only a limited number of the main system deliverables have been assured for compliance with the project requirements. This lack of assurance obviously presents risks to the project.
- 2.4.4 Members should also note that meetings of the FiReControl Project Assurance Board have been suspended pending agreement between CLG and EADS on the Test Strategy and Master Test Plan against which the Board can carry out this important assurance function. Therefore, there is a real potential for components of the system that CLG and EADS will wish to roll out to the fire and rescue service that will not have had the benefit of being considered by the Assurance Board, which again poses risks to this project.

2.5 Human Resources and Staff Consultation

- 2.5.1 Staff transfer consultation is making sound progress and agreement has been reached with the Fire Brigades Union in a number of critical areas.
- 2.5.2 As agreement has been reached regarding critical aspects of the staff transfer the Regional Joint Consultation Committee has decided to hold a series of further staff workshops (the first ones were held during May and June of 2009) at which all affected staff can be informed of progress to-date. These workshops supplement the excellent consultation process that is in place through and is a good example of the additional steps taken to ensure staff remain fully consulted regarding any potential changes.
- 2.5.3 Once again of concern is the fact that there is currently no go-live date which makes the human resource aspects of this project extremely difficult to plan.

3 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

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

4 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

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

5 RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 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 significant risks associated with the project but at present they do not threaten actual local service delivery within Tyne and Wear at this stage. Nevertheless, these risks are kept under regular review by the Chief Fire Officer and will be subject to further reports.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 CLG has confirmed funding allocations for the FiReControl project for 2010/11 with the release of Fire and Rescue Service Circular 21/2010. The circular

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shows an increase in funding for Fire and Rescue Services in the first wave regions. Whilst the circular confirms funding allocation for the next twelve months CLG have only released payments for the first six months.

- 6.2 An updated Circular is expected to detail when and how funds for the second six months are to be released. It is understood, however, that any funds will only be released on a month-by-month basis. CLG have always stated that this project will not cost fire and rescue authorities more than they are paying for their existing command and control functions.
- 6.3 However, this lack of funding visibility and the potential that funds may only be deposited on a monthly basis will present difficulties in managing and implementing this project, not least of which is the need to maintain the initial staffing pool resources. In addition, without confirmation of the actual amount of funding, planning resources allocations for the next six months is not possible and presents a potential that staff may have to be returned to their original posts within this Service rather than continue to deliver the project. Representations on this issue have been made to CLG and an outcome is awaited.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 The Authority is requested to:

- a) Consider and comment upon the content of the report;
- b) Receive further reports as appropriate.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

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

- Report into Communities and Local Government (CLG) Parliamentary Select Committee hearing into the FiReControl Project 1 April 2010.
- National Audit Office – Report of the findings of the FiReControl Enquiry January 2010.
- Extract from the Speech by Fire Minister Bob Neill to the Fire and Rescue Conference, Harrogate on Tuesday 29 June 2010;
- Fire and Rescue Service Circular 21/2010 - FiReControl Implementation Funding 2010-11