

TYNE AND WEAR FIRE AND RESCUE AUTHORITY**MEETING: 24 JANUARY 2011**

SUBJECT: FIRECONTROL UPDATE**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF FIRE OFFICER, THE CLERK TO THE AUTHORITY, THE FINANCE OFFICER AND THE PERSONNEL ADVISOR TO THE AUTHORITY**

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members with regard to the FiReControl Project and outline the anticipated next steps that will need to be taken.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As Members will be aware, on 20th December 2010 the Fire Minister, Bob Neill MP, provided a written statement to the House of Commons, which formally announced the closure of the FiReControl Project. (The Statement is attached as Appendix A for the information of Members).
- 2.2 Members are advised that as a result of this decision, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) notified all fire and rescue authorities that all funding for work associated with the delivery of the project would cease and that all remaining project funds would to be used to support project closure activities.
- 2.3 Acting on this information the North East Regional Project Board has now initiated a comprehensive closure process and, over the next few months, various aspects of project infrastructure, staffing and other elements of the FiReControl project will be dismantled in accordance with the information coming from DCLG.

3 NEXT STEPS

- 3.1 As Members will be well aware, the Authority has a statutory duty, under the Fire and Rescue Authorities Act 2004, to *"make arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel"*¹, and, with the demise of the FiReControl project, action will have to be taken to ensure that the Authority has a viable plan in place to replace the current command and control system by 2014. This requirement has already been formally acknowledged in the draft Integrated Risk Management Plan 2011/14, which is currently out for public consultation.
- 3.2 Members will be aware that the Authority's existing mobilising and associated sub-systems can be maintained until 2014. However, past experience would indicate that to replace the full mobilising and sub system infrastructure (from tender specification to delivery) can take between two and three years to deliver.

¹ Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004, Part 2, Section 7.2.c

- 3.3 With regard to the involvement of central government in future control room provision, DCLG is about to commence a full consultation process in order to consider what the future of fire control mobilising infrastructure and systems may look like. The consultation is aimed primarily at Members of fire and rescue authorities, fire and rescue services and their representative bodies such as the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers Association.
- 3.4 This consultation process is to run for twelve weeks, ending in early April 2011, with a summary of responses being published on the DCLG's website within three months of the end of the consultation period. It is envisaged that Ministers will wish to make decisions as soon as practicable after the conclusion of the consultation.
- 3.5 The Chief Fire Officer will be considering the questions posed within the consultation document when it is published. The Chief Fire Officer also considers that it would be prudent to await the outcome of this consultation before formally providing Members with advice in respect of the most appropriate option for the future provision of service within Tyne and Wear. However, this does not preclude the establishment of a project group to commence work on the IRMP action should this be approved by the Authority following the consultation exercise.

4 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 4.1 A risk assessment has been undertaken to ensure that the risk to the Authority has been minimised as far as practicable. The assessment has considered an appropriate balance between risk and control; the realisation of efficiencies; the most appropriate use of limited resources; and a comprehensive evaluation of the benefits. The risk to the Authority has been assessed as medium utilising the standard risk matrix based on control measures being in place. The complete risk assessment is available on request from the Chief Fire Officer.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There will be financial implication by virtue of this report however it is not possible to ascertain actual costs until the preferred option has been identified and a scoping study taken place. It is however envisaged that the replacement of a mobilising and resource management system alone could be in the region of £1m.
- 5.2 Some element of the cost of the replacement system may be well be forthcoming from central government. However, clarity on this matter is still awaited and is not likely to emerge until after the results of the consultation exercise.

6 EQUALITY AND FAIRNESS IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no equality and fairness implications in respect of this report.

7 HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no health and safety implications in respect of this report.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 The Authority is recommended to:

- a) Note the content of this report:
 - b) Endorse the actions taken to date;
 - c) Receive further reports as appropriate.
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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Speech by Fire Minister dated 21st December 2010

Fire and Rescue Service

I would like to inform the House about recent developments on the FiReControl Project.

This is the third part of the last Government's resilience programme and set out to replace the standalone control rooms in England's Fire and Rescue Services with a national network of nine control centres. The aim was to improve national resilience, interoperability and efficiency as well as to enhance the technology available to the Fire and Rescue Service.

Many Hon Members will be aware that, for some time, the project has experienced delays and delivery problems.

The progress of the project has caused serious concern, and so in June this year I made it clear to the main FiReControl contractor, Cassidian (formerly EADS Defence & Security), that the main IT system must now be delivered to time, cost and quality. At this point, we activated a key milestone in their contract requiring the main IT system to be completed in three control centres by mid-2011.

We told Cassidian that no additional taxpayers' money could be invested in this project, nor would delivery of a system of reduced quality or functionality be acceptable.

Following extensive discussion with Cassidian, we have jointly concluded, with regret, that the requirements of the project cannot be delivered to an acceptable timeframe. Therefore the best outcome for the taxpayer and the fire and rescue community is for the contract to be terminated with immediate effect. Cassidian and the Department for Communities and Local Government have reached an acceptable settlement over this although the details will remain commercially confidential.

I know many people in the Fire and Rescue Service and in Fire and Rescue Authorities have devoted considerable time and expertise to this project, especially those who have served on governance and working groups, directors of the local authority controlled companies, advisers from the Chief Fire Officers' Association, Fire and Rescue Service secondees to the project and other staff involved from the fire and rescue community, and many technical and resilience experts. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all these people for their contribution.

Over the next few weeks we intend to identify the extent to which any legacy assets from the project, including the control centre buildings, can be used for the benefit of the Fire and Rescue Service and local communities in future.

We will also be making arrangements for maintaining products already delivered.

The Department will cease funding activities directly associated with the project as quickly as is compatible with organising an orderly closing down of the project. We recognise that Fire and Rescue Authorities will now wish to review their control arrangements in the light of today's decision. This Government does not intend to impose any solution for the future of control room services.

PREVENTING PROTECTING RESPONDING

We will, however, start to consult the fire and rescue sector soon on how best the Government can support them, if at all, in developing their alternative plans based on the principles of localism, ensuring public safety, building up national resilience and delivering value for taxpayers' money. These continue to be our overriding priorities.

I know that the uncertainty around the future of this project has been frustrating and unsettling for the fire and rescue community and those closely concerned with their interests. My objective has been to deliver operational certainty for the Fire and Rescue Service and financial certainty for the taxpayer. Today's decision will deliver that objective and I will continue to keep the House informed of progress

