

## **7. Fire Control Consultation Response**

### **Purpose of report**

1. To seek Members' approval for a consultation response to the Department of Communities and Local Government's Consultation on the future of Fire and Rescue control services.
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### **Recommendations**

***The Chief Fire Officer recommends that the Authority:***

- i. note the contents of this report***
- ii. approve the proposed consultation response attached at Appendix 1***

### **Introduction and Background**

2. Members will recall that the national FiReControl project, which commenced in 2004, originally required all Fire and Rescue Services to support the development and implementation of a plan to transfer their control room functions to a network of nine regional centres. Unfortunately, this national project was terminated in December 2010 on the grounds that the requirements of the project could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe. The Government published a detailed consultation on future Fire Control arrangements which requires an Authority response.

### **Fire and Rescue Control Services Consultation**

3. The Government's Consultation document: 'The future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England' was published on 13 January 2011, with consultation responses due to be returned by 8 April 2011.
4. This detailed document considers a range of issues emerging from the termination of the national project including:
  - the legacy assets from the FiReControl project and how they might best be used;
  - the lessons learnt from the FiReControl project;
  - whether the aims of the project – improving national resilience, efficiency and the technology available to the Fire and Rescue Services – are still valid and how these might be achieved; and
  - the principles for allocating any funding available.
5. A proposed response is attached at Appendix 1 for Members' consideration. Once discussed and approved by the Policy and Resources Committee, this will be submitted to the Department for Communities and Local Government on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Authority.

## Financial Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
There are financial issues that require consideration	Y	Referenced in consultation response

## Legal Considerations

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
There are legal issues e.g. contractual and procurement, reputational issues that require consideration	Y	Referenced in consultation response

## Additional Considerations

6. The table below sets out any additional issues arising from the proposals contained in this report and identifies the relevant paragraphs in the report where such issues are addressed.

Consideration	Yes/No	Reference in Report i.e. paragraph no.
<b>Resources</b> (e.g. Assets, ICT, Human Resources, Training & Development, Sustainability).	Y	Paragraph 4 and Appendix 1.
<b>Strategic Policy Links</b> (e.g. IRMP, Authority Plan, Equality & Diversity, Partnerships, Environmental Impact).	Y	Already incorporated into strategic plans
<b>Risk Management / Health &amp; Safety</b> (e.g. risk management and control measures, risk register score).	Y	Risk register being updated in response to changing circumstances
<b>Consultation with Representative Bodies</b>	Y	Representative Bodies are being fully engaged in the range of issues which are emerging from the project's cancellation.

## Supporting Information

Appendix 1 – Proposed Consultation Response

### Background papers

‘The Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England’ (consultation document)  
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fireandrescuecontrolservices>

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**Proposed Response - The Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England (Consultation Document)**

Consultation Questions	Response of Hereford and Worcester Fire Authority
<b>Section 3 – Lessons from FiReControl</b>	
<p>Q1 Do you agree with the assessment of FiReControl set out in Section 3? What lessons do you think we can learn from FiReControl – both positive and negative?</p>	<p>We agree in part with this assessment. However, we believe that the project's risk of failure would have been significantly reduced if greater care and attention had been paid to fundamental issues and concerns raised by FRS professionals at an early stage in the project's development. These were raised in good faith through the appropriate governance channels by FRS staff who were committed to ensuring a successful outcome for the project. However, they were frequently dismissed or ignored. Issues raised include :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the changing nature of the business case, including the move over time from cost efficiency to resilience</li> <li>- concern over the rapid, ambitious and costly development of the control centre buildings,</li> <li>- significant potential for legal and operational risks over staffing, governance and command arrangements</li> <li>- the ambition of the IT system, where assurances were given in several public forums that <i>'the proposed IT system is already in place and working end to end within the UK FRS'</i></li> </ul>
<b>Section 4 – Defining the policy objectives</b>	
<p>Q2 Are resilience, enhanced technology and efficiency still as important today as they were when the FiReControl project was initiated? If not what has changed?</p>	<p>These three factors are still as important as when the project was first conceived. However, their context has changed in many ways. Technology has developed at such a pace that systems with greater functionality and at a lower cost are now available to services for rapid deployment and at a lower cost than the originally designed project. This factor, and the current focus on the delivery of locally focussed, locally accountable services create significant contextual changes. These highlight the potential strength of more locally-based, costs efficient, collaborative solutions which will deliver both value for money and resilience required.</p>
<p>Q3 Which aspects of resilience described in Section 4 are most important for control services? Are there other aspects which are not mentioned here?</p>	<p>All aspects highlighted within this section are important and interdependent in their contribution to overall resilience. The ability to secure resilient fall-back arrangements within a small group of networked (and similar in terms of operations, e.g. Met-Met-Met, or CFA-CFA-CFA rather than a mix)</p>

	<p>could be considered to be particularly important in its ability to support both spate condition issues, as well as other potential business continuity issues such as localised technology failure.</p> <p>An important additional factor for consideration is the strengthening of communications, local intelligence and data sharing with police and ambulance control rooms.</p>
Q4 Do you think that there is a role for central government in supporting technical enhancements in fire and rescue control rooms – and, if so, what should this be?	<p>It would be beneficial for some degree of central determination of nationally agreed technical standards due to the critical nature of the activities that these control systems support. In addition, central government must ensure sufficient resources are available to local services to ensure that the most resilient and up-to-date solutions are in place across the UK. This approach will ensure that national resilience is in place whilst ensuring that individual organisations retain the ability to deliver effective collaborative arrangements to be put in place at a local level.</p>
Q5 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?	<p>Yes, through ensuring the availability of ‘invest to save funds’ from central government to support the development of local, collaborative solutions which deliver shared control room functions, be this physical (buildings), resources (staff) or technological (shared command and control systems).</p> <p>Additionally, a significant and often overlooked cost for all fire authorities resides in Firelink charges which that do not represent value for money. This is a particular issue for the West Midlands area which had negotiated and agreed a collaborative regional approach (‘MARF’ – Midlands Area Radio Project) which was then overtaken by the Firelink programme. This original approach would have delivered better value for money to the Services involved than the current contractual arrangements negotiated by the centre. Additional issues regarding the use of voice rather than data means that this cost differential is likely to be even higher.</p> <p>A potential role for central government (CLG) would be negotiating lower service charges from Airwave. This will particularly important in coming years when the current Airwave contracts for fire, police and ambulance expire.</p>

Section 5 – Central government support	
Q6 Which of the approaches (or combination of approaches) for the delivery of control services set out in Section 5 would provide the best outcome for the fire and rescue community and the public? Please give reasons for your choice.	<p>We believe that <i>‘A combination of local determination with central funding and support, adhering to national standards owned by sector’</i> would provide the best outcome as described.</p> <p>The current vacuum left through the cancellation of the national FiReControl project has created significant risks at local level in the delivery of a key aspect of FRSs statutory duties. These risks can only be mitigated with sufficient financial support being made available from the centre to local Services; local services in their turn must seek cost effective alternative arrangements, local collaborative arrangements are likely to prove the most effective and efficient approach to early resolution of urgent issues.</p>
Section 6 – Funding choices	
Q7 Do you agree that the right funding priorities are set out in Section 6 and do you have any comments on the order in which these are presented?	<p>The presented funding priorities appear to be appropriate, but the order should be adjusted to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Completing the installation of Firelink as the top priority.</li> <li>2. Funding technical enhancements to improve resilience.</li> <li>3. Funding accommodation or control room infrastructure costs arising out of delays to FiReControl.</li> <li>4. Funding restructuring costs to support shared control services.</li> </ol> <p>Firelink as a priority is considered sensible. Secondary to Firelink should be the funding of technical enhancements to improve resilience (be this through new or integrated legacy command and control systems). These are the two top priorities that should be addressed <u>now</u> to secure business continuity within the fire and rescue service sector.</p> <p>The funding of accommodation or control room infrastructure costs arising out of delays to FiReControl are largely financial recovery matters and whilst important (and must be addressed) are not business critical. The funding of restructuring costs to support shared control services is considered to be more longer term and must be subject to proven business cases of deliverable benefits, as opposed to a knee-jerk reaction to the cancellation of FiReControl.</p>

<p>Q8 Which of the technical options for Firelink (see Annex C) would best meet fire and rescue service needs? Please give reasons for your choice.</p>	<p>Preferred Option: <i>Option 3 – Implement a full networked voice and data connection to Firelink in existing control rooms.</i></p> <p>We plan to implement a collaborative solution to our current Control Room issues, working towards a shared infrastructure arrangement with Shropshire FRS. We both believe that option 3 be made available to all fire and rescue services.</p>
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