

15. Regional Fire Control

Purpose of report

1. To update Members on progress and issues regarding the FiReControl Project, particularly the outcome of the CLG Select Committee Inquiry into the FiReControl Project and Local Government Association evidence.
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Recommendation

The Chief Fire Officer recommends that the Authority note the update on the Regional FiReControl project.

Background

2. In 2008 it was announced that delivery of the FiReControl Project would be delayed by 10 months; in 2009 this delay was extended by a further 9 months, placing the cutover date for Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service at March 2012. Since these announcements, the Service has continued its progress toward cutover in accordance with the transition plan.

The CLG Select Committee Enquiry

3. In 2009, it was announced that there would be a CLG Select Committee Inquiry into FiReControl. The objective of the Committee was to examine:
 - a. Progress with the project so far;
 - b. The reasons for the cost and time overruns that the project had experienced;
 - c. What changes, if any, need to be made to the Government's plans for proceeding with the project.
4. The inquiry was convened in February 2010 and along with many other stakeholders H&W contributed written evidence. Oral evidence to the Committee was received from key stakeholders including the Chief Fire Officers Association, the Fire Brigades Union, EADS (the main contractor for the project) and the Local Government Association.
5. The Select Committee report was published in April 2010; the LGA circulated a summary of the Committee findings on 15 April.

Local Government Association (LGA) Response

6. The key points from the LGA written evidence were:
 - a. the project so far has been characterised by a lack of leadership, poor procurement and contract management in government which, coupled

with contractor inertia, means FiReControl is at serious risk of becoming another failed Government IT project;

- b. confidence and trust in the project is at rock bottom, most Fire and Rescue Authorities are beginning to consider what alternatives to Fire Control might be put in place, some have had enough and want the project cancelled;
- c. any net additional costs falling on FRAs of the project proceeding, or failing, must be funded under New Burdens principles, this includes Firelink; and
- d. A realistic economic and operational assessment should be made of alternatives to FiReControl to inform thinking on the future of the project.

Summary of Findings from Select Committee Report

7. Key findings from the Committee report, as circulated by the LGA include:

- (i) The FiReControl project is part of a key strategic objective of the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), but its current status is precarious. CLG and the main IT contractor, EADS, have had an adversarial relationship.
- (ii) They do not have a revised contract and there is no currently agreed project plan; until recently, there has been a lack of consultation and collaboration between CLG, EADS and those intimately involved in the Fire and Rescue Services (and some criticise the standard of the present consultation).
- (iii) Project management has been severely criticised, with a rapid turnover of crucial CLG and EADS senior staff.
- (iv) Since its inception, the costs of the project have escalated, and severe delays to the project mean that Fire and Rescue Authorities may now be expected to migrate to the new system at the very time that they should be concentrating on the high-profile safety concerns presented by the Olympic Games in 2012.
- (v) The main representative bodies of the Fire and Rescue Service all have reservations about the project—many go further and have deep hostility—and fear that, as it is presently managed and designed, it will lead to a less efficient and less safe service.
- (vi) The project has been beset by a lack of openness and collaboration with the main stakeholders from the start. If CLG had been more open from the start, many of the ensuing problems might not have occurred. This lack of openness has continued to the present, with CLG not allowing us (the Committee) to have sight of independent reviews of its management of the project - even in confidence - which implies a certain insecurity about its handling of the FiReControl project to date.

8. However, if CLG were to abandon the FiReControl project now, not only would all the claimed benefits of the project in terms of greater speed, responsiveness and efficiency be lost, but it would cost an extra £8 million more than if it were left to proceed.
9. CLG is not quite at the point of no return, but it very soon will be.

Recommendations from the Select Committee Report

10. The Select Committee recommended that CLG should continue with the project with renewed vigour, but this recommendation is conditional upon CLG:
 - a. resolving its contractual dispute with EADS and implementing a viable project plan;
 - b. closely monitoring delivery of FiReControl against interim milestones, and examining alternative viable options for delivery to be implemented in case of any slippage;
 - c. addressing the shortcomings in its management of the project;
 - d. consulting fully with FRS staff and professionals in defining end-user requirements;
 - e. taking further steps to shift the negative perception of the project and to influence Fire and Rescue Authorities to make the positive decision to switch to the new system; and
 - f. providing assurances that the safety and security of the Olympic Games will not be compromised during the roll-out of the new Regional Control Centres.

Issues for Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service

11. Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service continues to be committed to the FireControl Project and is working hard to support its progress, although further delays in key components of project are creating further challenges to its delivery.
12. The Service is scheduled to cutover to the Regional Control Centre in mid 2012 and will be the last FRS in the region to do so. Progress on the Transition Plan is continuing and the Service is on course to meet the requirements of the next scheduled milestone gateway in September 2010.
13. An update over the future direction of this project following the change of Government is now awaited. The Service continues to monitor risks closely and explore options to reduce these, including the potential for the procurement of interim solutions and collaborative arrangements with local partners, as described to the Authority in September 2009.

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