FiReControl Full Business Case – CLG paper

Purpose and Background

1. The FiReControl Business Case sets out the rationale for investing public money in the FiReControl project.   It also provides assurance that:

    -   FiReControl is a resilience priority;
    -   the costs, benefits and risks are identified and balanced;
    -   procurements have been undertaken professionally; and
    -   the project is deliverable.

2. As with any large scale project, the Business Case is constantly evolving with particular versions produced to support reviews and key decision points.   The last version was published in June 2007 following the department signing a £200m contract with EADS in March 2007 for the company to develop, deploy and maintain the FiReControl system.

3. Since then, the FiReControl national project team has been working closely with the Local Government Association, at elected member and officer levels, and with regional stakeholders to build understanding and confidence in the Business Case.

4. The department committed to publish the next version of the Business Case at the end of June. It is now unlikely to go out on 30th June, but is expected to be published later that week.   A version was originally planned for February this year but after advice from the LGA and the Chief Fire Officers' Association it was agreed to publish later in the year.   Essentially, everyone was clear that the next iteration of the Business Case should be as comprehensive and up-to-date as possible.

Latest Version: Developments

5. Publishing the Business Case in June enabled the Business Case to take into account on-going procurements, particularly the Facilities Management contract, and to review all the assumptions which underpin the Business Case.

6. The department has just concluded an intensive and robust process – involving the LGA and other stakeholders – to review all of the assumptions underpinning the Business Case.   This process has involved a review group of stakeholder

representatives, chaired by Cllr. Jerry Willmott, which included principle officers, FRA treasurers, lawyers and HR specialists from across England.

7. At the same time, independent accountants have also been working with all 45 FRAs in England to capture and verify the costs of running their existing control rooms. The department believes that this transparent approach and commitment to understanding existing and future running costs should provide a high level of confidence in the Business Case.

8. The department understands that elected members have expressed concerns about the financial implications of FiReControl – the Business Case will set out the latest position following this robust process which we believe will provide a realistic, honest and transparent analysis.

9. In response to feedback, particularly from elected members, the Business Case will include – for the first time – annexes which gives specific information for each of the English regions. These annexes are intended to be digestible regional 'perspectives' which set out key information for elected members. This will include regional costs/savings analysis and the particular resilience benefits for a particular region.

Resilience Benefits

10. Clearly, it should not be forgotten that the primary rationale for this project is to deliver enhanced resilience and considerable operational benefits to the Fire and Rescue Service and its staff – that is why the Chief Fire Officers' Association supports the project.

11. It is important to recognise that the current system has limitations – individual control rooms use different technology so they cannot easily back each other up during periods of high demand; they cannot access the same information so cannot deploy resources; and, in some cases, can only take messages for other control rooms.

12. The modern, purpose-built Regional Control Centres will be resilient, fully-networked, use the same technology and able to back each other up – particularly important if there is a major incident like last year's floods.

13. For example Sir Ken Knight's report, published on 17 March this year, set out the benefits he believed would be seen from FiReControl.

14. This is about giving the Fire and Rescue Service the best possible tools to do their jobs – to help them save lives. It will enable firefighters to have the best possible information to tackle any incident; it will ensure the public receive the highest level of service; and it will empower control room staff to back each other up.

Next Steps

15. The Business Case is due to be published at the end of June. A number of events have then been planned in the regions.

16. The department will welcome feedback on the business case and will set out the timetable for this when the business case is published.

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