

FiReControl

To members of the Fire Services Forum

***'Inadequately planned, poorly executed, and badly managed'* - Report of the CLG Select Committee on Fire Control, April 2010**

15 April 2010

Dear Colleague

Over the last year the Fire Services Management Committee's number one priority has been the Fire Control project. We have discussed it at every one of our meetings and at every meeting of the Fire Forum. The majority of members of the FSMC are unhappy with the management and execution of the project as well as the costs to FRAs of replacing legacy systems.

The CLG Select Committee has published the report of its inquiry into Fire Control. The LGA submitted written evidence; myself and Cllr James Pearson, LGA Senior User on the project, gave evidence to the Committee. The Select Committee came to the same conclusion as the LGA: that the Fire Control project was 'inadequately planned, poorly executed, and badly managed' and that fire authorities should not be out of pocket as a result of delays in the project. The Committee asked that the government report progress to the Select Committee after the general election.

One of the LGA's greatest strengths is its ability to influence the agenda at a national level and you can be assured that I will be following up this issue at the earliest opportunity with the new Minister. I urge you to take the time to read the full report; it will give you important information to help with decisions on this key project. As a taster I attach a briefing summarising the key findings of the Select Committee report.

Finally, I have invited the Chief Executive of EADS UK, Robin Southwell OBE, to attend the next meeting of the FSMC in May and discuss the way forward. I think it is time that we, as the end user, spoke directly with the providers of Fire Control.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Brian Coleman
Chairman, Fire Services Management Committee and Fire Forum

LGA BRIEFING

This briefing summarises the findings of the 2010 CLG Select Committee Inquiry into Fire Control. The full report can be found at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomloc/352/352.pdf>.

Background

1. The aim of the FiReControl project is to enable greater speed, responsiveness and efficiency in the mobilisation of fire-fighters in response to a fire or other related incident. It proposes to replace the existing 46 local FRS control rooms with nine purpose-built Regional Control Centres (RCCs). These centres will handle emergency 999 calls, mobilise resources and support the management of incidents, underpinned by a resilient network technology.

2. The CLG Select Committee announced its inquiry in November 2009. The LGA submitted written evidence in January 2010 and Councillor Brian Coleman, Chairman of the LGA's Fire Services Management Committee, and Councillor James Pearson, LGA Senior User on the project, gave oral evidence to the Committee on 8 February 2010. The LGA's written evidence and a summary of the oral evidence can be found at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/core/page.do?pagelid=18306>.

LGA key messages

3. Key points from the LGA written evidence:

- 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 Fire Control is at serious risk of becoming another failed Government IT project;
- 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;
- any net additional costs falling on FRAs of the project proceeding, or failing, must be funded under New Burdens principles, this includes Firelink;
- a realistic economic and operational assessment should be made of alternatives to Fire Control to inform thinking on the future of the project.

What the Committee said

Project governance and management

4. In May 2009 the Public Accounts Committee criticised CLG for poor performance in contracting and managing the New Dimension project. CLG responded by asserting that it had learnt lessons and was improving its delivery, citing the FiReControl project. The inquiry found that this is not the case, that its current status is precarious.

5. The Committee is clear that the FiReControl project has been inadequately planned, poorly executed, and badly managed. 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.

6. The report found that the original contract was ill-suited to the nature of the project. There is no revised contract and there is no currently agreed project plan; CLG and the main IT contractor, EADS, have had an adversarial relationship with each blaming the other for project failings. In evidence CLG were cautious in the ability of their contractor to deliver. The lack of a close link and integration between the Fire Link and Fire Control projects was found to show a lack of foresight and inadequate project management by CLG.

7. High staff turnover in CLG, especially at a senior level, has compromised the Department's ability to manage the project effectively. Project management is severely criticised, with a rapid turnover of crucial CLG and EADS senior staff. The report notes that some of the written evidence refers also to the number of Ministers that have held responsibility for the project since its inception.

Stakeholder relationships

8. Relationships with the major stakeholders have been mishandled, until recently, there has been a lack of consultation and collaboration between CLG, EADS and the Fire and Rescue Service. There was a lack of openness and collaboration with the main stakeholders from the start and if CLG had been more open then many of the ensuing problems might not have occurred. This lack of openness has continued to the present, with CLG not allowing 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.

9. The Committee recommended that CLG put in place a communications plan that aims to shift the negative perception of the project and to influence FRs to make the positive decision to switch to the system. CLG must respect the right of each FRA to make the final decision on whether to accept FiReControl and must work hard to unite all FRAs in supporting FiReControl. Any failure to ensure that all FRAs use the new system would be a significant blow to the ultimate aims of the project.

Costs and delays

10. Since its inception, the costs of the project have escalated. The National Audit Office stated that the Department currently predicts that the FiReControl project will cost £423 million. While the Department originally expected the project to realise efficiencies and save costs locally that would be in excess of the costs of the project, the Department now expects the overall project to cost £240 million¹²⁸ more than the local savings forecast. Not every Fire and Rescue Authority will make net annual cost savings locally as a result of the project and the Department plans to make annual payments of £8.2 million to those Fire and Rescue Authorities.

11. 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.

Contingency plans

12. Meanwhile, the Committee recommended, CLG should urgently draw up and consult on contingency plans for any further failures. As a priority, those contingency plans should ensure ongoing safe and effective fire and rescue cover across the whole country whether or not

FiReControl is implemented. They must also ensure that all regions involved will have adequate fire and safety measures in place during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The plans should include provision for the maintenance and, where necessary, upgrading of existing control room technology, **and CLG should meet the full costs to FRAs where it has become necessary as a result of delays in the FiReControl project.**

The future of the project

13. The Committee also found that, on balance, given the investment of public funds already committed, and the benefits that will accrue, CLG should press ahead with the FiReControl project. 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. CLG is not quite at the point of no return, but it very soon will be.

14. The report recommends that CLG should continue with the project, with renewed vigour, but this recommendation is conditional on CLG:

- resolving its contractual dispute with EADS and implementing a viable project plan;
- closely monitoring delivery of FiReControl against interim milestones, and examining alternative viable options for delivery to be implemented in case of any slippage;
- addressing the shortcomings in its management of the project to ensure that the target 'go-live' date of mid-2011 will be met;
- consulting fully with FRS staff and professionals in defining end-user requirements;
- 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
- 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.