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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian Coleman".

FIRE AND RESCUE CONTROL SERVICES

Thank you for your letter of 22 February regarding the future of the control centre buildings and other issues in the current consultation on fire and rescue control services.

As you are aware, Fire and Rescue Authorities are being offered the control centre buildings first as they were purpose built for fire and rescue control room services. I am pleased to hear of the interest among Fire and Rescue Authorities in taking over the buildings. My officials have followed up swiftly any contact made by authorities to the Department in response to the invitation in my letter in January to all Fire and Rescue Authority Chairs and Chief Fire Officers when we launched the consultation. I am surprised, therefore, that the members of the Local Government Group's Fire Services Commission feel they have experienced difficulty in setting up these discussions. So far my officials have met with representatives from over 30 Fire and Rescue Authorities, from all round the country.

However this offer is still open and I would urge authorities to take it up. Please encourage members to contact Madeleine Rudd (Tel: 07507 473979 or 0303 444 2846, email madeleine.rudd@communities.gsi.gov.uk) in my Department. As you are aware from the London negotiations we are more than willing to enter into these discussions and, indeed, I am scheduled to meet a delegation representing some Fire and Rescue Authorities later this month about commercial arrangements. Our well-known preference is for Fire and Rescue Services to take over the control centre buildings as they were purpose built for fire and rescue control room services.

On your suggestion that funds held by Local Authority Controlled Companies should be retained by Fire and Rescue Authorities in the region to maintain current control rooms, I should point out that all Fire and Rescue Authorities have continued to be funded, via

traditional funding streams, to maintain and replace their control room systems. Authorities have also received funding to meet closedown costs for the FiReControl project and we have agreed to give them an additional £20k to meet planning costs as we recognise they need to review and revise future plans for fire and rescue control services.

In the consultation we have asked for views on priorities for allocating any funding available, which includes the funding currently held by the Local Authority Controlled Companies. We will not be in a position to confirm the priorities until after the consultation is concluded. For these reasons, I do not feel it appropriate for the authorities to retain the additional funding until there is a clear consensus, through the consultation process, on these priorities.

I hope you find this helpful.

With best wishes

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Bob Neill', written in a cursive style.

BOB NEILL MP