

9 February 2011

Firelink and FireControl Projects - Update

Report by the Chief Officer

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1 Summary

- 1.1 On the 20 December 2010 the Fire Minister Bob Neill MP, confirmed that the national FireControl project was to be scrapped. He said that following extensive discussion with the main project contractor 'Cassidian', it had been jointly concluded that; "the requirements of the project could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe".
- 1.2 As a result, there is a need to determine the future of the local authority controlled company set up to manage the south east region control centre – the 'South East Fire and Rescue Control Centre Limited'. This report concludes that it should be wound-up.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Authority agrees to the winding-up of the 'South East Fire and Rescue Control Centre Limited' (SEFRCC) and mandates Councillor Price to vote to dissolve the company on their behalf.

3 Regional and national project work

- 3.1 The regional project team (based in West Sussex), will be closed down as soon as practicable. The Government's own project team will also be closed down as the various aspects of the project are de-commissioned.

4 Existing assets and legacy equipment

- 4.1 The Government will consult with fire and rescue authorities, on options and arrangements for the maintenance of legacy equipment previously provided as part of the regional control centres project. The Government will identify the extent to which any current assets, including the regional control centre buildings, can be used for the benefit of the fire and rescue services and local communities in the future.
- 4.2 The Firelink radio scheme and mobile data terminals fitted to our fire engines will be retained. However, the optimum use and benefit of this equipment will not now

be realised as intended in the short-term. This development work will continue within the Service, and also as part of the Control Options Appraisal Project (COAP) considerations.

5 South East Fire and Rescue Control Centre Limited

5.1 The South East Fire and Rescue Control Centre Limited (SEFRCC) - often referred to as 'the LACC' [Local Authority Controlled Company] - is currently chaired by Councillor Price. The Board of Directors last met on the 7 January 2011. In response to the Government's announcement to scrap the project, - and acknowledging there is unlikely to be a 'whole of the south east' alternative to the regional project - the SEFRCC Directors (all fire and rescue authority representatives), discussed the Company's future. The Directors were asked to seek approval from their respective authorities to enable the SEFRCC Board (at its next meeting on the 18 February 2011), to make a decision to wind-up the Company as soon as practicable.

5.2 In considering winding-up the company, the Board discussed the two possible options: either to dissolve the company or to maintain it as dormant. The main benefit of 'dormancy' is that the Company could be resurrected relatively quickly if the need for it should a need arise. This would entail a modest annual registration fee. However, this needs to be balanced against the work involved to maintain registration including the submission of annual accounts. Additionally, there are ongoing responsibilities and liabilities for named Directors and the Company name and it's articles of association would need to be changed in order to reflect any future use. Consequently it is recommended the Authority mandates Cllr Price to recommend to dissolve the Company as soon as practicable.

6 Human Resource Implications

6.1 The Service's dedicated project team consists of six 'Grey/Green Book' members of staff. Consideration is now being given to their re-deployment or continued employment, as appropriate. Staff briefings following the Government's announcement have been given to Control Room staff.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 The Service's project team is funded by the Government through the department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). Payment is received on a monthly basis. CLG has confirmed that a final monthly payment will be made to authorities to meet the costs of project closure. For Hampshire this will be £13,291.

7.2 To support the closure of the SEFRCC, and the regional project team, CLG will make additional payments totalling £32,982.

7.3 CLG have also indicated it will provide financial support of £20,000 to each authority during 2011/12 to support activity related to exploring control service options for the future. This work will be progressed as part of the COAP project.

- 7.4 The financial charges for the use of the Firelink radio scheme will continue as planned from June 2011. For the year 2011-2012 this cost is an additional £235,000.00 with full year costs for 2012-2013 totalling £283,000.00. These additional costs have been incorporated within the Authority's draft budget.
- 7.5 CLG has requested that a return is made by the 18 March 2011 with a breakdown of any additional costs attributed to the closure of the project. This return will be completed and submitted by the current FireControl project team on behalf of the Authority.
- 7.6 Discussion and consideration of the financial implications regarding the future use and maintenance of legacy equipment will continue with CLG. The financial implications associated with an alternative to the Service's current command and control system will be considered by the Service Management Team in June 2011.

8 Conclusion

- 8.1 Closure of the FireControl project team and the South East Fire and Rescue Control Centre Limited, will end the Authority's association with the national project. The Service's existing command and control system is expected to continue operating until 2014. Detailed work is now taking place to ensure a smooth transition for key areas of project work such as mobile data and the Firelink radio scheme. The Service's established COAP project team will continue to research possible options to replace the current command and control system.

9 People Impact Assessment

- 9.1 There are no issues arising from this report and it is considered compatible with the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights, the Human Rights Act 1998, and the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000 and the People Impact Assessment for this project.

Background Information

The following documents disclose the facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and has been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of the report:

None

NB The list excludes: (1) Published works and (2) Documents that disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.