

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Services' Response to CLG Consultation 'The Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England'

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service / Authority welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government's consultation – "The Future of Fire and Rescue Control Services in England".

The Executive Summary, states that fire and rescue authorities "..... *have continued to maintain their current control services in good order – and have been funded to do so.*" Whilst we have continued to 'maintain' our fire control system, it has not been upgraded or replaced to the latest, stable platform. We believe that Government should provide additional funding to upgrade or replace current systems.

The summary continues "*Under the Government's preferred approach central government would provide financial support to help fire and rescue authorities improve their existing control services and make use of FiReControl legacy assets.*"

Whilst this Authority welcomes the provision of financial support to improve our existing Fire Control, we question the value of the legacy assets. Of the key assets listed in paragraph 2.9 of the document, only one, the Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) are of direct benefit to us, albeit with a considerable ongoing cost. We do not believe the Regional Control Centre (RCC) buildings are affordable, even if they are offered with a substantial discount on rent. With facility management costs, rates and utilities, we estimate the cost of the SE RCC would be in excess of £1m per year before adding staff costs and technology. An individual authority's expenditure would far exceed their current costs and it is questionable even whether through collaboration, adoption of this capital asset represents good value for money.

Below is Hampshire's response to the specific questions in the consultation document:

Q1 Do you agree with the assessment of FiReControl set out in Section 3? What lessons do you think we can learn from FiReControl - both positive and negative?

The relationship with the Fire and Rescue community was poorly managed. There was no direct relationship with EADS and fire and rescue services had very little influence over either the contractor's performance or CLG – these points were raised consistently through CLG Select Committee hearings. CLG's regional representatives seemed to have little influence on the department's decisions. Change Control Notices (CCNs) were issued by CLG with little consultation with fire and rescue services.

The regional solution to Fire Control failed to take into account the local fire and rescue service command and control function. There was no confidence that the RCCs could adequately meet operational requirements for local mobilising and the level of flexibility that a local control room provides. The role that FRS Fire Control

staff perform in incident management seemed to be completely overlooked in the regional model. This is not an argument for local knowledge rather it is the recognition of the importance of Fire Control's role during an incident with the optimum use and deployment of resources by experienced and motivated Fire Control staff.

The completion of the nine purpose-built RCCs before the business case was finalised was completely contrary to the Government's own policy for approving PFI funding for fire and rescue authorities where the funding is only provided after very scrupulous examination of the business benefits of the project. The design and ethos of the RCC buildings were completely disproportionate to their role and the cost legacy is that the buildings are not affordable for fire and rescue service use.

A positive outcome from the project was the work carried out by the SE Operations Policy and Procedures group (SEOPAP). SEOPAP works across all nine SE FRSs to harmonise pre-determined attendances (PDAs) and produce standard operating procedures (SOPs). The region remains committed to continuing this work to establish coherent cross region responses. It is believed that support from CLG to this approach across the sector would promote the standardisation of operational procedures and response, which would lead to considerable cost benefits, safety advantages and better interoperability.

Q2 Are resilience, enhanced technology and efficiency still as important today as they were when the FiReControl project was initiated? If not what has changed?

These issues are still important today. Resilience is still high on the agenda but the level proposed by FiReControl was not necessarily required. Smaller FRS collaborations could offer suitable resilience at a more affordable cost whilst utilising current off the shelf technology that doesn't require bespoke modifications.

In Hampshire FRS (HFRS) the enhanced technology of MDTs has allowed us to provide current, risk critical information to the fire ground from all of our frontline fire appliances. However, we do not currently have MDTs in small vehicles due to the SAN F MDTs and enclosures being too large. We believe that supply and fitting of these should be included in 'completing Firelink'. Additionally, at the time of Firelink vehicle installations and an imminent change to our car policy, we elected to defer the installation of radios in officers cars as we believed this would save money for CLG and the FRS. Subsequently a request for the supply of these radios to be installed into the new FRS provided car scheme vehicles for officers has been rejected by CLG.

To complete the usefulness of this technology the MDTs would need to be integrated with our aged Command and Control system to provide status messaging, automatic vehicle location systems and full data capability. As FiReControl will no longer provide this functionality, is essential that the Firelink project is completed to allow full data communications from FRS control rooms to appliances.

Q3 Which aspects of resilience described in Section 4 are most important for control services? Are there other aspects which are not mentioned here?

HFRS support the level of resilience described in Case Study 2: Wales. In considering all options we are working with Dorset and Wiltshire FRSs to consider implementing a similar system whereby we could provide resilience for each other during large incidents, spate conditions and equipment failures. We believe that each FRS having separate but integrated systems is more resilient than one shared system. We are considering demand based crewing across the three FRSs and the possibility of one or more of the Controls being day-crewed.

Q4 Do you think that there is a role for central government in supporting technical enhancements in fire and rescue control rooms – and, if so, what should this be?

We believe that central government should provide specific funding to support technical enhancements or assist FRSs who have old legacy systems, as many authorities, including Hampshire, did not make financial provision for these enhancements/replacements due to the imminence of the move to the regional control centre.

We support the 'localist' approach, allowing services to provide the most suitable Fire Control facilities to meet local requirements, but with financial support from central government to encourage authorities working together to obtain resilience (through 'buddying') and to enable essential technological improvements to be made at a time when grant funding to fire and rescue authorities is being reduced in real terms.

Funding should be provided to support the upgrade or replacement of existing systems and associated hardware (telephony and main system servers, etc.) and the upgrade of MDTs to what was proposed under MDT2. Financial support should also be provided for the provision of SAN-H equipment although this could be hosted by one FRS for a 'cluster' of neighbouring FRSs (see the answer to Q6 ref CCI ports).

The completion of Firelink (as intended by FiReControl) would provide full data communications from the Airwave system to FRS C&C systems. This is an achievable technical enhancement and cost saving necessity for all FRSs. It should be centrally managed in the same way as the existing Firelink project was managed, rather than each FRS or group of FRSs independently procuring systems and services.

Q5 Do you think that there is a role for central government in helping fire and rescue authorities to achieve greater efficiencies in the delivery for control services – and, if so, what should this be?

We believe central government can help the FRSs in a number of ways:

To obtain greater efficiency by encouraging shared Fire Control services and ‘buddying’ arrangements in the longer term. Investment in new technology and meeting potential redundancy costs for displaced control staff under TUPE are potential barriers to a collaborative approach. Government funding of these costs would encourage shared solutions.

The use of framework agreements such as ‘Sprint 2’, managed centrally to speed up and simplify the procurement of C&C systems.

To support and promote nationally the work carried out by the SEOPAP group (as mentioned in paragraph 2 of Q1) to harmonise pre-determined attendances and SOPs. Support to this approach across the sector would promote the standardisation of operational procedures and response, which would lead to considerable cost benefits, safety advantages and better interoperability.

Q6 Which of the approaches (or combination of approaches) for the delivery of control services set out in Section 5 would provide the best outcome for the fire and rescue community and the public? Please give reasons for your choice?

We believe the approach should be one which is determined locally as individual fire and rescue services are best placed to determine an approach which meets local requirements and risks. Fire and rescue services should be able to retain their own control rooms for effective operational command and control but encouragement, through financial support, should be given to initiatives which promote collaboration to improve resilience. This could include technological solutions for remote mobilising by a neighbouring fire and rescue service and a hosted (and shared) SAN-H digital radio interface for data handling.

Our preferred option for the future of fire control in Hampshire is a fully integrated and resilient ‘buddy’ arrangement with Dorset and Wiltshire. This model provides the best balance between resilience, efficiency, local management and accountability. Working together the three FRSs have identified the following benefits:

- Each fire and rescue service retains its own Fire Control for command and control and incident management possibly using shared systems or integrated systems with resilience as its main focus.
- Each fire and rescue service has full mobilising capability for the other services providing resilience for spate conditions/major incidents and fallback.

- Separate cross-regional 'buddying' for severe weather conditions or pandemic loss by including by-geographical fallback (we are in discussions with Kent and Staffordshire who will also join in the joint procurement process).
- Staff 'pooling' with opportunities for promotion, short-term cover for sickness etc. Shared training and additional efficiency by sharing Control management resources.
- Opportunity for demand led crewing and day crewing models with one or more of the FRS considering day-crewed Controls.
- Shared procurement with a common system, common data standards and interoperability.
- Shared SAN-H CCI ports and integrated ICCS.
- Common SOPs and PDAs aligned to the national incident types using the approach developed by SEOPAP.
- Common data management and GIS.
- Flexible implementation with emphasis on enhanced resilience at an early stage in the project.

Q7 Do you agree that the right funding priorities are set out in Section 6 and do you have any comments on the order in which these are presented?

We support the completion of Firelink as the top priority for funding for the reasons given in our responses to previous questions (see the response to Q4 regarding provision of small screen MDTs and radios for officers). HFRS's fire control system has not been replaced because of the RCCs, we believe that central government should support the costs of the replacement C&C and for the associated telephony hardware and software.

We believe that the tripartite model set out in the answer to question 6 will allow us to deliver the functionality and resilience that would have been delivered by FiReControl. We are seeking financial support for this project. This includes the specification and procurement of the replacement Command and Control systems which will be a shared procurement exercise with the intention that Hampshire FRS will replace it's C&C system first. CLG will be aware of the financial support required based on the previous implementation in Wales.

To complete the delivery of Firelink we believe that CLG should raise and pay for a Change Control Note with Airwave to relocate five of the CCI ports from the SAN-H currently in boxes at the SE RCC to HFRS HQ. HFRS probably has physical space for a complete SAN-H but would not need the capacity of the RCC SAN-H and would not want the financial burden of 'owning' it. CLG may wish to offer space on the SAN-H to other FRSs or for Airwave to 'host' the SAN-H as a service.

Q8 Which of the technical options for Firelink (see Annex C) would best meet fire and rescue service needs? Please give reasons for your choice.

We believe that Option 3 (implementing a full networked voice and data connection to Firelink in existing control rooms) is the only technical option for Firelink. The cost of the SAN-H equipment could be reduced if it is 'hosted' by one fire and rescue service or by Airwave for a number of neighbouring services using the networked capability and we would want to investigate whether a shared ICCS would also be technically possible. This option should be centrally managed, funded and rolled out by CLG/Firelink.

With regard to Option 4, (use Firelink connections in control centre buildings) we believe that it would be expedient not to complete the SAN-H installation in the SE RCC in the timescales indicated, but to delay this installation until the requirements for use of the building are clear. We believe it is highly possible that the SE RCC will not be used by SE FRSs and that the SAN-H planned for installation could be installed at another location and used by FRSs as indicated above.

Firelink has much to offer in meeting services' mobile data strategies, particularly to exploit the potential for data communication and mapping data linked to incident location and operational risk information.