Communities and Local Government

The future of fire and rescue control services in England

Consultation

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January 2011
Department for Communities and Local Government

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Ministerial foreword

When I took over as Fire Minister in May 2010, the FiReControl project was running at least 19 months late and experiencing significant delivery problems.

I understood that many people in England's fire and rescue community supported the aims of improving the resilience, efficiency and technology of control services and had devoted considerable time and expertise over a number of years in trying to deliver this project. I recognised too the disappointments and frustrations that many – not least the staff working in control rooms – had experienced as a result of the delays and uncertainties during its lifetime.

With this in mind I reviewed the project very carefully to see if there was anything we could do to put things back on a proper footing. However, following extensive discussions with Cassidian (formerly EADS Defence and Security), the contractor responsible for integrating the main system, I found that the requirements of the project could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe and decided, therefore, that it was in the best interests of both fire and rescue services and the taxpayer to call a halt.

The priority now, for Fire and Rescue Authorities, is to review their existing control arrangements in the light of this decision. The Government does not intend to impose any solution for the future of control room services in England. Fire and Rescue Authorities will be free to determine their own priorities. They can work together on a collaborative basis in a way that works best for them and their officers can exercise their professional judgement in determining the best and most efficient way to deliver local services. The consultation is intended to support this process.

I wish to put on record my thanks to the Local Government Association, the Chief Fire Officers Association and all elected members and Fire and Rescue Authority employees for all their work on FiReControl over the past few years. I am determined that your efforts will be put to good use and have asked my officials to speak with interested Fire and Rescue Authorities during the consultation process to identify the extent to which the legacy assets from the project, including the control centre buildings, can be used for the benefit of the fire and rescue services and their local communities.

Now, it is time for a fresh start and I am confident that the sector will take the lead in delivering any change. Central government, for its part, will trust the judgements you make and support you in delivering this vital public service.

Bob Neill MP

The consultation process and how to respond

Scope of the consultation

Topic of this consultation:	The future arrangement of fire and rescue control services in England following the decision to close down the FiReControl project.
Scope of this consultation:	The consultation invites views from the fire and rescue sector on whether resilience, technology and efficiency are the right priorities to shape control services in the future and presents four different approaches for delivering change based upon the Coalition Government's decentralisation policy. The consultation asks about fire and rescue service priorities for upgrading control services and explains that the amount of central funding available for this will be linked to decisions taken by fire and rescue authorities on the use of the buildings and other assets procured for FiReControl. The consultation also asks what lessons we can learn from FiReControl.
Geographical scope:	England
Impact assessment:	An impact assessment has been completed for this consultation and can be found in Annex D.

Basic information

To:	This consultation is aimed primarily at members of fire and rescue authorities, fire and rescue services and their representative bodies (eg Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers Association, Fire Brigades Union). Suppliers in the fire and rescue industry will also have an interest.
Body/bodies responsible for the consultation:	This consultation is being facilitated by the Fire and Resilience Directorate within the Department for Communities and Local Government.
Duration:	This consultation will run for 12 weeks from 13 January 2010 to 5pm on 8 April 2011.

Enquiries:	For enquiries, please contact the following: Daniel.rothberg@communities.gsi.gov.uk 0303 444 4142 Any complaints about the way this consultation is being handled should be addressed to: consultationcoordinator@communities.gsi.gov.uk
How to respond :	By email to: Daniel.rothberg@communities.gsi.gov.uk Or by post to: Daniel Rothberg Department for Communities and Local Government Zone 3/B4, Eland House Bressenden Place London SW1E 5DU
Additional ways to become involved:	Key interest groups will be engaged directly during the consultation period to discuss project assets. Representatives from the Department will be available to attend locally organised consultation events if invited to do so.
After the consultation:	A summary of responses to the consultation will be published on the Department's website within three months of the end of the consultation period.
Compliance with the Code of Practice on Consultation:	The consultation period complies with the recommendation in the Code of Practice.

Executive summary

The first part of this document (Sections 1–3) introduces the consultation and reviews the history and legacy of the FiReControl project. The second part (Sections 4–6) looks forward and asks what type of fire and rescue control service is needed in the future.

Section1 explains that, following the cancellation of the FiReControl project, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is seeking views from the fire and rescue community on whether changes are needed to the way that their control services are currently structured. The consultation runs from 13 January to 8 April 2011 and views are welcomed from members of the fire and rescue community as well as anyone else with an interest in the provision of fire and rescue control services in England. Ministers expect to make an announcement on the way forward quickly, following the end of the consultation process.

Section 2 sets out the background to the FiReControl project and the legacy it leaves behind. The project was part of the previous Government's Fire and Resilience Programme launched in 2004 and the project's objective was to replace standalone fire and rescue service control rooms with a resilient network of nine regional control centres. Whilst progress was made in some areas of the project, the main IT system proved more challenging than expected, leading to substantial delays.

When the new fire minister reviewed the project in June 2010 he found that the broad principles of improving efficiency, enhancing technology and increasing resilience were sound but there were fundamental and continuing problems with delivering the required technology to an acceptable timeframe. The European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS) Defence & Security (now trading as Cassidian) – the main contractor – was unable to resolve these issues and the Fire Minister concluded that it would be in the best interests of the taxpayer and the fire and rescue services to cancel the project and work with the fire and rescue community on the future of England's control services.

It is important to note that the statutory responsibility for responding to emergency calls rests with fire and rescue authorities. They have continued to maintain their current control services in good order – and have been funded to do so. There are no immediate implications for public safety arising from the decision to cancel FiReControl, although fire and rescue authorities will wish to review future control arrangements in the light of this decision. This consultation seeks feedback on fire and rescue authorities' priorities for the allocation of any additional funding which may be available from central government.

A significant amount of taxpayers' money has been invested in procuring equipment and technology for FiReControl and entering into long-term lease agreements for the control centre buildings. Staff from the fire and rescue community have also invested a great deal of time in helping the Department to develop new protocols and common ways of

working for the FiReControl network. Now that the project has ended, it is important to make sure that this legacy is not overlooked, and that the fire and rescue community is able to benefit from this investment.

Section 3 considers the lessons from FiReControl. The project was cancelled because of delays to the main IT system but there are additional lessons we can learn from it. Some relate to the early decisions taken by the Department, especially around the control centre buildings, but there were also issues around the Department's relationship with the fire and rescue community which should be reflected upon.

Section 4 considers whether the policy objectives which led to FiReControl are the right issues to shape decisions on the future of control services in England:

- **Resilience** – this Government supports the aim of resilience but believes that there are now alternative approaches which could provide a more proportionate and affordable solution than FiReControl.
- **Enhanced technology** – many fire and rescue services have continued to develop their technology systems during the past six years and so many of the features that FiReControl would have introduced are already widely available.
- **Efficiency** – in view of the current financial pressures many fire and rescue authorities are likely to be looking for innovative ways to reduce the cost of their control service.

Section 5 introduces the concept of localism and considers alternative scenarios for control services. The Coalition Government believes that its own contribution should be limited to areas where it can add value and its role really cannot be devolved to others. The following four scenarios are suggested that reflect varying degrees of decentralisation (set out in detail in Annex A):

- a system of local controls without any central intervention or financial support
- the development of a common set of standards
- greater collaboration between fire and rescue authorities with some central intervention or support (the Government's preferred option)
- a standard networked solution.

These scenarios are not all mutually exclusive and different elements may be combined but this is a useful basis to start from. The Coalition Government believes that a balance needs to be struck between achieving maximum resilience and providing a service which is affordable for the taxpayer. 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.

Views are sought on whether this approach to decentralisation offers the best way forward for fire and rescue control services and whether other approaches (or elements of other approaches – such as the adoption of common standards) also have merit.

Section 6 explores the funding choices available and invites views on how these should be prioritised. It is not yet known how much funding from central government will be available. However, it should be recognised that this will be limited and that funding will need to be distributed over a number of years.

Section 1

Introduction

1.1 This section sets out the background to the consultation on the future of fire and rescue control services in England.

1.2 Following the cancellation of the FiReControl project, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) is seeking views from the fire and rescue community (principally fire and rescue services and authorities) on how control services should be structured in the future, who should take the lead in delivering any change and how any central resources should be allocated.

1.3 During the consultation period the Department expects to actively engage in discussions with fire and rescue community representatives in order to test the assumptions set out in this document and to begin discussions with authorities who are interested in taking on, or retaining, the leases to the control centre buildings. This work will not prejudice the outcome of the consultation but it will ensure that Ministers have sufficient information to reach a decision and that any announcement on funding and legacy assets can be made as soon as possible. Representatives from the Department are also be available to attend locally organised consultation events if invited to do so.

The consultation document

1.4 In this document we review the history of FiReControl and ask what useful lessons we can learn from the project. We consider the strategic objectives that underpinned FiReControl and ask whether these are still the right priorities to inform decisions that need to be taken on the future of control rooms. We review the legacy of FiReControl – the nine control centre buildings, the technology which has been developed and the work on common standards – and consider how we can make best use of these assets, as well as any additional funding that may be available, to deliver a good deal for the fire and rescue community and value for the taxpayer. We also look at the relationship between central and local government and ask how, in the light of the Government's localism agenda[1], we can rebalance this relationship to ensure that the fire and rescue community is at the vanguard in leading any change to control room services.

[1] *Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide*
http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/decentralisationguide

1.5 The document sets out four possible scenarios for the future of control room services which are based upon the different approaches to decentralisation identified by the Coalition Government. These scenarios are not mutually exclusive and it may be possible to blend elements of these together. However, reviewing the scenarios separately provides a framework which enables us to consider some fundamental questions about the type of control service needed and also to think about some practical arrangements, such as how best use can be made of the FiReControl legacy assets and any additional funding that may be available.

Section 2

Background to the FiReControl project

2.1 This section examines what happened to the FiReControl project and where we are now. It explains why the project was cancelled, and describes the legacy assets and infrastructure procured by central government for FiReControl which could be made available to the fire and rescue community.

Background

2.2 The FiReControl project was part of the previous Government's Fire and Resilience Programme which aimed to strengthen national and local resilience by improving the infrastructure, interoperability and capabilities of the fire and rescue services. The other elements of the programme – Firelink and New Dimension – are both now operational. Firelink provides a single, digital wide-area radio system for fire and rescue services across England, Scotland and Wales. New Dimension provides specialist equipment and training in England and Wales to deal with major incidents, such as high volume pumps for flooding, urban search and rescue units for building collapse and mass decontamination equipment.

2.3 The FiReControl project was formally initiated in 2004 with the main IT contract signed three years later in 2007. It aimed to replace England's 46 standalone control rooms with a resilient national network of nine regional control centres which would use the same technology, same protocols and be able to back each other up at busy times. The main elements of FiReControl were:

- a single IT network able to handle all emergency fire and rescue calls and mobilise the most appropriate fire and rescue resources to send to an incident, on a national basis
- nine networked regional control centres run by local authority controlled companies (in London, the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority took on this role) each located in a purpose-built high-specification control centre building
- common systems, procedures and mobilising protocols to be used by all control centres and fire and rescue services
- safety and efficiency improvements for firefighters, such as on-board computers (known as mobile data terminals) with satellite navigation.

2.4 Some progress was made. The eight local authority controlled companies were established to run the new control centres, each with a Board of Directors appointed from their constituent fire and rescue authorities. In London this role was undertaken by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority. All made good progress in appointing staff into key senior management positions and agreeing policies and procedures for the new organisations.

2.5 A useful body of work was also completed which sets a baseline for common ways of working across the fire and rescue services – known as 'ways of working'. A significant amount of data capture and other work was carried out within individual fire and rescue services to prepare for the move to FiReControl.

2.6 There were however increasing delays in the development of the main IT system. FiReControl was a complex project, involving the integration of technologies that had never before been used together and this proved more challenging than expected. In December 2010 the Department and Cassidian jointly concluded that Cassidian could not deliver the requirements of the project to an acceptable timeframe and that the best outcome for the taxpayer and the fire and rescue community would be to terminate the contract. The total estimated cost of the project had increased from £100m to £423m, mainly due to the delays.

2.7 An important point to note is that the Government expects no immediate implications for public safety resulting from the decision to cancel the FiReControl project and the public will experience no degradation in the service they have been receiving. The statutory responsibility for responding to emergency calls rests with the individual fire and rescue authorities under the *Fire and Rescue Services Act* 2004[2]. The authorities receive funding for this purpose through a combination of central grant and locally raised taxes. The fire and rescue authorities have maintained their current control room services in good order during the period of the FiReControl project, and continue to do so. We expect that the authorities and their fire and rescue services will wish to undertake a comprehensive review of their current control arrangements in the light of the decision to cancel the FiReControl project.

FiReControl legacy assets

2.8 The cancellation of the FiReControl project creates a substantial legacy for central government and the fire and rescue community. A significant amount of taxpayers' money has been invested in procuring equipment and technology for FiReControl and entering into long-term lease agreements for the nine bespoke control centre buildings. Local authority controlled companies have demonstrated the value of

[2] *The Fire and Rescue Services Act* 2004
http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents

collaborative working. Considerable fire and rescue service resource and effort has also gone into developing new protocols and shared 'ways of working'. Going forward, we need to make sure that this legacy is fully utilised, and that wherever possible the fire and rescue community, and the taxpayer, have the opportunity to benefit from this investment.

2.9 Some of the key assets from the project are listed below, with a more comprehensive list given in Annex B. Steps will need to be taken to determine future ownership, maintenance and support arrangements. The key assets are:

- nine high quality control centre buildings, procured through a private developer scheme, with leases of 20 or 25 years
- Firelink radio equipment available in seven control centre buildings, providing an interface with the Airwave digital radio network currently operational in the fire and rescue services
- 1,700 on-board computers (known as mobile data terminals) fitted to fire appliances in England through the Firelink project, with software provided through FiReControl
- new station end equipment installed in around 270 local fire stations in eight fire and rescue services. This is used to mobilise fire crews and communicate details of incidents
- video displays, furniture and other hardware installed in some of the control centres.

Section 3

Lessons from FiReControl

3.1 This section looks at what lessons we can learn from FiReControl in order to make the right choices for the future.

IT delivery issues

3.2 The decision to cancel the project was taken because the IT system could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe. FiReControl was a complex project, involving the integration of technologies that had never before been used together and this proved more challenging than expected. In June 2010 Ministers made it clear to the main contractor, Cassidian (formerly EADS Defence and Security), that the project had to be delivered to time, cost and quality. Further Ministers emphasised that no additional taxpayers' money could be invested in this project, and that a system of reduced quality or functionality would not be acceptable.

3.3 Following the experience of FiReControl and other well-known IT projects, this Government's position is that such large-scale IT projects should now be avoided and not embarked upon by the public sector.

3.4 There are other lessons we can learn from FiReControl, particularly with regard to the early decision making, the governance arrangements and the need to build greater trust between central government and the fire and rescue community.

Early decision taking

3.5 Some of the problems experienced by FiReControl related to decisions that were taken in the very early days of the project. The nine control centre buildings, with lengthy leases, were procured before the new technology had been developed and a realistic schedule was in place. While the IT costs were subject to a fixed price agreement, other costs – including the lease costs – continued to be incurred as the project was delayed. Now that the project has been cancelled, the Department must continue to underwrite the cost of the control centre leases. This will reduce the overall amount of funding that will be available for fire and rescue authorities to improve their control services unless these buildings become part of the authorities' plans or other users can be found.

Relationship with the fire and rescue community

3.6 The Department signed the commercial contracts and managed the relationship with FiReControl's major suppliers. Fire and rescue representatives were not involved in these aspects of the project and it led to concerns about the project's lack of openness and transparency. In particular, fire and rescue services feared that the final system would not meet their professional needs, and fire and rescue authorities feared that additional costs would be passed on to them once the system went live. Many of these issues were raised at the Communities and Local Government Select Committee hearing into FiReControl in February 2010 and were set out in the Committee's subsequent report. [3]

3.7 FiReControl was included by the Department in *The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008–11*[4]. The Department set up extensive governance arrangements and endeavoured to deliver the project in partnership with the fire and rescue community and the main supplier, Cassidian (formerly EADS Defence and Security). The fire and rescue community had mixed views about the project – some supported FiReControl's broad aims and championed the project, whilst others felt that it was being imposed upon fire and rescue services against their wishes. Notwithstanding these differences, all fire and rescue authorities and their services cooperated fully with the Department, and undertook all necessary transition work which was funded by central government through specific grants.

3.8 From the Department's perspective, partnership working was difficult to achieve because individual fire and rescue services and individual authorities often had varying views on specific issues. As a result of this it could be difficult, if not impossible, to agree a common approach that satisfied everyone. It was often difficult to reach a consensus, or gain endorsement for a decision, even within a single region, let alone across the fire and rescue community as a whole.

3.9 In addition, this Government's view is that the regional structure promoted by the previous Government and adopted for the control centre network and governance structures was one of the key reasons why the project lacked political support from many within the local government sector.

Q1 Do you agree with this assessment? What lessons do you think we can learn from FiReControl – both positive and negative?

[3] Communities and Local Government Committee. *FiReControl – Fifth Report of Session 2009–10* (HC 352) http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcomloc.htm

[4] http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/nationalframework200811

Section 4

Defining the policy objectives

4.1 The policy objectives for FiReControl were improving resilience, enhancing technology and increasing efficiency – although these had different levels of prominence at different times. In this section we look at whether these continue to be the right objectives to consider when shaping decisions on the future of the emergency control arrangements for fire and rescue services.

Resilience

4.2 The United Kingdom faces a complex range of threats – terrorism, cyber attack, unconventional attacks using chemical, nuclear or biological means, as well as large scale industrial accidents and natural disasters. This Government believes that a coherent Government-wide approach to national security is needed and in October 2010 published *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: the National Security Strategy* – the outcome of the Strategic Defence and Security Review[5]. The intention is to work with all the emergency services – including fire and rescue services – to improve their capability and capacity to handle emergencies and to make the country's infrastructure as resilient as possible within the resources available.

4.3 For emergency planning purposes, the Government publishes an assessment of risks facing the UK in the *National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies*[6]. Many of these risks have the potential to disrupt the essential work of fire and rescue control rooms, for example:

- pandemic disease affecting control room staff
- severe weather or inland flooding, leading to extreme volumes of calls or affecting control rooms directly
- major industrial accidents or technical failures causing disruption to telecommunications, electricity supplies or water and sewerage systems
- attacks on infrastructure, including cyber attacks.

[5] *A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: the National Security Strategy*
http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/PolicyStrategyandPlanning/SDSR/StrategicDefenceAndSecurityReviewsdsr.htm

[6] *Full National Risk Register of Civil Emergencies 2010*
http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/national-risk-register

4.4 FiReControl was set up by the previous Government in response to a series of large-scale emergencies that occurred in the UK during the early 2000s – such as the blockade of oil refineries, widespread flooding and a major foot and mouth outbreak, as well as the 2001 terrorist attacks on 9/11 in the USA. Recognising the role that fire and rescue control services would play in responding to major incidents, the project aimed to address key risks in the national risk assessment, by:

- improving physical security, by moving controls into highly resilient and secure buildings which could continue to operate during, for example, the failure of power or water supplies
- improving fire and rescue services' ability to deal with local failures, staff shortages or large peaks in emergency (999) call volumes, through the provision of a network of control centres which could answer each others' calls
- improving the ability to mobilise resources on a national scale during a major crisis.

4.5 This Government supports the aim of resilience but it does not believe that a national network of regional control centres is the only way to achieve this. Recent advances in technology mean that there are now alternative approaches, which are more affordable and may offer a proportionate response to the risks we face. In view of the cancellation of FiReControl, it is helpful to consider what we mean by control service resilience and what aspects of this are most important for the protection of the public.

Physical security

4.6 Control room security and resilience is an important factor in ensuring that fire and rescue authorities can meet their statutory obligations to take calls and respond to incidents, and to ensure business continuity of these services. However, most existing control rooms have not been designed to meet formal standards of security and resilience – such as the requirements set out in the *Government Security Policy Framework*[7]. They rely on external fallback arrangements if the control room is out of action and unable to take calls.

4.7 The control centre buildings constructed for FiReControl were designed to meet highly demanding criteria and standards for security and resilience. These included:

- selection of sites to minimise risks of natural or man-made disaster (for example, low flood risk areas, avoiding proximity to aircraft flight paths and major industrial hazards)

[7] *Government Security Policy Framework*
http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/AboutDefence/WhatWeDo/PolicyStrategyandPlanning/SDSR/StrategicDefenceAndSecurityReviewsdsr.htm

- extensive physical and protective security measures
- resilient electrical and environmental systems – ability to continue operations for an extended period in the face of power, fuel or water supply failure.

4.8 The Department plans to make these highly resilient buildings available to fire and rescue authorities for their future control room service arrangements. We would like to start discussions with interested authorities during the consultation period so that any agreements can be reached as soon as possible after the consultation period has ended.

Dealing with high volumes of calls

4.9 Current control rooms are not networked so any overspill of calls is dealt with by implementing limited 'buddy' arrangements with other control rooms or emergency services. If control rooms suffer failures or become overloaded so that calls cannot be answered, the calls are diverted to other, nominated, control rooms by the 999 operators. The processes for dealing with overflowed calls are often manually intensive, which gives rise to problems at times of extreme demand when control rooms are under pressure.

Case study 1: Flooding during summer 2007

Two major flooding events occurred during June and July 2007 as a result of heavy downpours across the country. Thousands of people, homes and businesses were immediately affected by the floods, with the recovery phase taking many weeks after the water had subsided. The flooding had a serious impact on the critical local infrastructure and a number of essential utilities were threatened by the unprecedented levels of rainfall.

During September 2007 the Government's Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser, Sir Ken Knight, was asked by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to carry out a review of the fire and rescue service operational response to the flood-related emergencies.

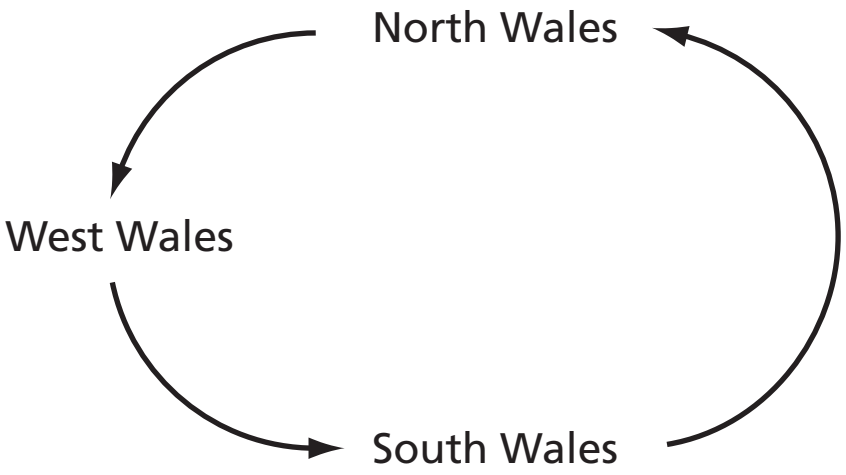
The review found that call handling and mobilising experienced major problems during the summer floods, both in fire and rescue services directly affected by flooding and also in those which did not suffer flooding directly but their emergency control rooms assisted in dealing with the enormous volume of calls. At peak call volumes there were also significant effects on the 999 system at service provider level and this had a knock-on effect on other emergency services.

BT, which handles approximately 80 per cent of 999 calls, experienced difficulties caused by restrictions in capacity for individual fire and rescue control rooms. BT attempted to connect these calls to the respective fire and rescue services but, given the limited number of operators in each control room and the relatively small number of available mobilising workstations, they were unable to accept more calls. BT initially tried to connect fire and rescue calls using the pre-determined buddy arrangements to the nominated control buddy but in some cases the localised nature of the severe weather meant that the nominated buddy was also affected by floods and unable to accept the calls. This, in turn, affected BT's ability to answer other calls as they are unable to terminate a 999 call until the caller is connected.

4.10 The FiReControl project aimed to create a network of control centres whose operators would be able to take calls and mobilise resources to any incident regardless of location. A system of local control rooms cannot be expected to match the call-handling capacity of a national network. It is, however, possible to improve on the current standalone arrangements by ensuring that all control rooms have robust and efficient relationships with other control rooms to provide overflow call handling and fallback. This could involve providing remote access to systems in the buddy control rooms (as has been done in Wales) or providing a means to take calls and mobilise in the buddy control room on their own system (as in Scotland).

Case study 2: Wales

Wales has three control rooms all independently operating but with access to each others' systems via an intranet. Each control room has a specific 'buddy' that can use its systems to take calls and mobilise resources should it experience a surge of calls or a failure, as illustrated below. Control rooms can also mobilise each others' appliances using data over the Firelink radio system.



Case study 3: Scotland

Scotland has nine control rooms: one for each fire and rescue service and an additional one in Strathclyde. All have the ability to mobilise by data and control different appliances. The control rooms do not have access to each others' main systems and rely on BT re-routing calls and buddy arrangements similar to those in England.

There is interoperability of communications between control and appliances. Procedurally, a control room sending an appliance to another area can instruct that appliance to log on to another control room. After that the appliance sends and receives data to and from the second control room rather than its host control. In an emergency any Scottish appliance can log on to any control room in Scotland. Scotland explored, and subsequently abandoned, plans for the regionalisation of its fire and rescue control rooms.

4.11 The report by the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser[8] following the 2007 flooding in England recommended that fire and rescue authorities improve the ability of existing control rooms to handle large volumes of calls and to address the most critical limitations on call handling capabilities prior to the introduction of FiReControl. With the cancellation of FiReControl, it is important that these recommendations

[8] *Facing the Challenge* – Flooding Review March 2008
http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/floodingreview?view=Standard

are carried out and that fire and rescue authorities consider how the resilience of call handling capabilities can be further strengthened:

- Fire and rescue authorities should consider the business case for the use of queuing arrangements and automated announcements in exceptional circumstances, thus providing callers with reassuring/intelligent information while the call handling agencies are dealing with other calls. Wording used to callers in such circumstances should be accordance with the Public Electronic Communications Services Code of Practice
- Fire and rescue authorities should review their current call handling 'buddy arrangements' and consider adding another control room, geographically distant from their own area, that is less likely to be affected by the same severe weather or other major events
- Fire and rescue authorities should consider whether their current staffing arrangements for their existing fire controls provide sufficient flexibility to increase their capacity during spate conditions.

Mobilising resources during a major emergency

4.12 Local control rooms monitor the status of resources and mobilise appropriate resources to incidents. For large-scale incidents (especially those for which New Dimension resources must be deployed), national co-ordination arrangements rely on voice contact with the local control rooms. FiReControl aimed to improve on these arrangements by giving visibility of the status and location of all resources, including New Dimension equipment, throughout the control centre network nationally, along with the ability to mobilise and make covering moves to support major incidents (subject to the necessary mutual aid agreements being in place). This will not be possible under a non-networked solution. However, the current mutual aid arrangements have been used on a number of occasions, and have proved to be robust.

Technological enhancement

4.13 As a result of developments in technology during the past six years, many of the state of the art features that FiReControl would have introduced are widely available in off-the-shelf systems, and have been adopted by an increasing number of fire and rescue services. These include:

- automatic vehicle location systems which allow the exact location of all fire appliances to be identified
- satellite navigation which provides route planning information and

- the provision of risk data to the on-board computers in fire appliances.

Along with the work undertaken in the FiReControl project to develop common procedures and processes, data standards and interfaces, these developments provide opportunities for better collaboration between fire and rescue services and improve their ability to handle each others' calls.

4.14 The delays in implementing FiReControl have led many fire and rescue authorities to invest in their existing control rooms and introduce new systems which use the latest technology. The previous disparity between control rooms is therefore diminishing and it is questionable what barriers remain to fire and rescue authorities embarking upon their own technology improvement programmes or merging their control rooms with other authorities which have already invested in new technology.

Case study 4: Enhanced technology

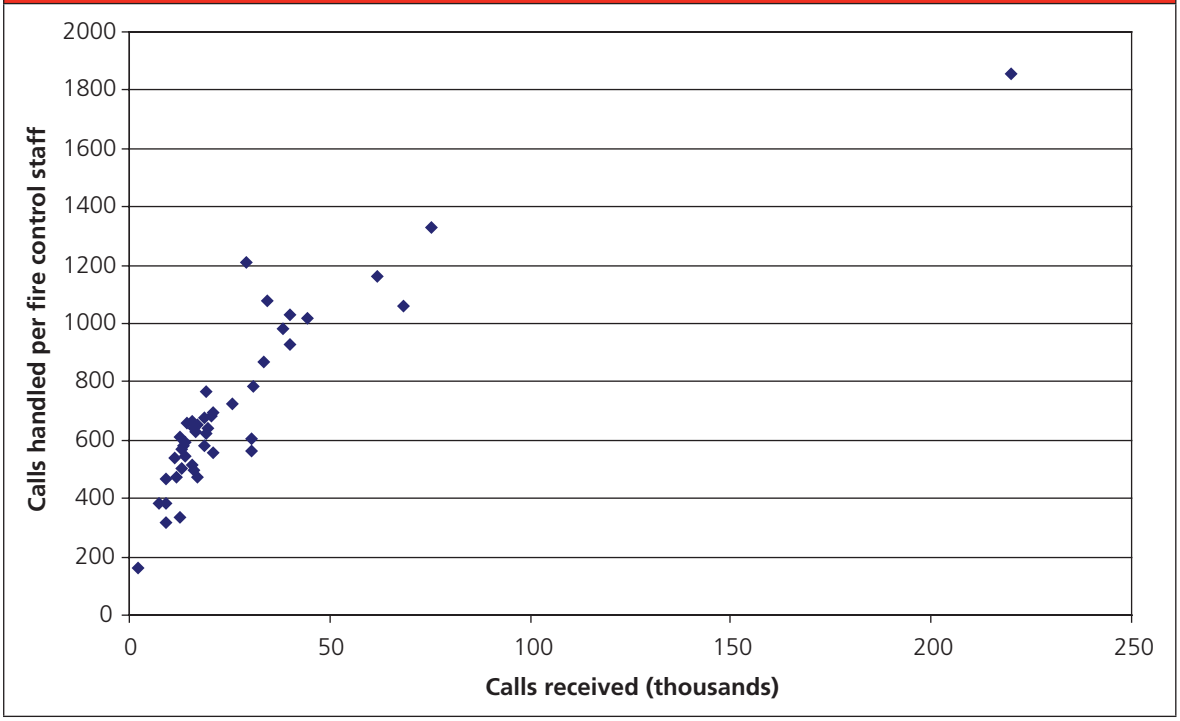
For some years, Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service has been one of the most innovative in using mobile data and other technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness. Enhanced technologies have included:

- Mobilisation of the nearest available resource to an incident by using automatic vehicle location systems to determine the current location of appliances, and calculation of travel time by road to the incident location. In an environment where appliances are often away from stations undertaking community fire safety activities, this allows faster response times to be achieved compared with traditional station ground mobilisation.
- Use of caller location technology for both fixed and mobile callers coupled with a premises-based gazetteer for the whole county to improve the accuracy of mobilising.
- Improving the safety of firefighters en route to an emergency by presenting risk information obtained from the caller, the location and response times of other appliances responding to the incident and identifying any risk information held for the address of the incident.
- Use of data rather than voice for status, mobilisation and incident messaging to appliances. This reduces the workload on control staff and provides clear, accurate messages.
- Extension of mobile data capabilities to officers – including the use of text to voice technology to 'read' data messages to officers while driving.
- Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service has been investigating the use of demountable data terminals with built-in TETRA (Terrestrial Trunked Radio – Firelink) capability to improve communications with crew working away from fire appliances. Uses include support for the incident command system and direct input to back office workflow systems, eg reporting hydrant defects and community fire safety inspections.

Efficiency

4.15 There are currently 46 separate fire and rescue control rooms in England which require significant on-going investment in technology and staffing. For even the quietest control rooms, a minimum number of staff is required to allow for breaks, absence due to holidays or sickness and the fact that one incident can often result in multiple calls. In practice, this means that, in many control rooms, staff regularly undertake routine fire and rescue service administrative and auxiliary tasks during quieter periods. Figure 4.1 illustrates that the average number of emergency calls taken by each member of control staff varies significantly across England[9]. In London the average number of emergency calls taken each year is in excess of 1,800 per operator (average of around 13 per shift), whilst in the quietest control room it is fewer than 200 per operator (average of around one per shift). For a high proportion of control rooms staff take between 500 and 700 emergency calls per annum or, broadly, four to five per shift.

Figure 4.1: Fire and rescue control room efficiency – current position



4.16 With the cancellation of FiReControl and the financial pressures that all fire and rescue authorities are now facing, many authorities are likely to be looking for ways to reduce the cost of their control service provision. Options to make control services more efficient include outsourcing or sharing control services with other fire and rescue authorities or sharing them with police and/or ambulance emergency services. For example, a recent Home Office consultation on the future of the police

[9] *FRS Operational Statistics Bulletin for England 2009–10*
http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/frsoperationalstats2009-10

service (*Policing in the 21st century: Reconnecting police and the people*[10]) has highlighted the need to make savings through greater use of shared services.

Balancing efficiency and resilience

4.17 Simply outsourcing control services or sharing control rooms does not necessarily increase resilience – arguably it could reduce it as the impact of a single control room failure would be spread over a wider geographical area. However, resilience benefits should be gained where a fire and rescue authority is moving its control service to a more modern shared system with effective backup arrangements. Resilience can be improved by increasing collaboration between fire and rescue authorities – for example, by ensuring that groups of control rooms have common procedures and processes, share data standards and interfaces and have effective arrangements in place to provide overflow call handling and fallback.

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?

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

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?

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

[10] *Policing in the 21st century: Reconnecting police and the people*
http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/consultations/policing-21st-century/

Section 5

Central government support

5.1 This section describes the Coalition Government's approach to decentralised service delivery[11], sets out a framework to help us think about how control services should be delivered in the future and offers four potential scenarios for the arrangement of control services.

5.2 FiReControl was an example of top-down policy where the people responsible for frontline delivery were not closely involved in decision making. The Coalition Government favours a decentralised approach to service delivery. It believes that central government's contribution should be strictly limited to those areas where it is clearly adding value and where its role cannot sensibly be devolved to others.

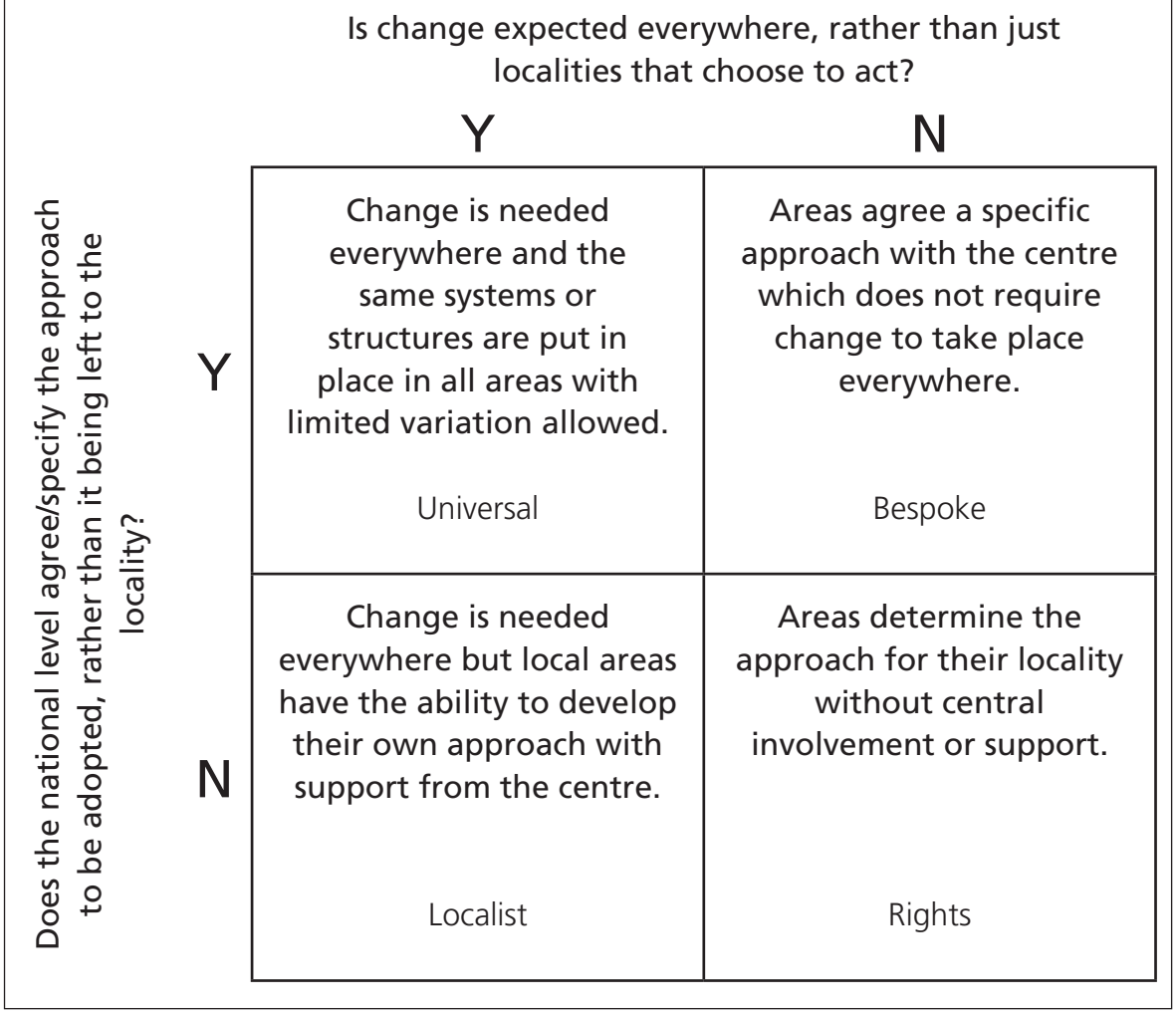
5.3 The new partnership between central and local government will be rooted in the Coalition Government's plans for decentralisation. This will involve a major culture change right across government – the centre will need to trust the local sector to meet the needs and priorities of service users. Wherever possible top-down burdens will be removed and direct intervention will be limited, thereby freeing up the sector to stimulate innovation and efficiency. Central government's role will be to support rather than lead, helping to ensure that resources are targeted in a way that is fair to individual authorities whilst achieving value for money for the taxpayer as well as fire and rescue services.

5.4 Of course, the approach taken to decentralisation cannot be uniform across all services. Some services are of such national importance that a universal approach is needed, whilst for others it is right that local authorities should be left to develop their own solutions either with or without support from the centre.

5.5 Figure 5.1 below provides a framework to help decide how decentralisation should be applied to fire and rescue control services.

[11] *Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide*
http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/decentralisationguide

Figure 5.1: Decentralisation framework



5.6 This way of thinking about decentralisation can help us to think about what the future organisation of control services should look like:

- If we believe that the current system of controls is able to meet current and future call-handling and mobilisation needs, including the handling of major incidents, then there can be no justification for central intervention. Individual fire and rescue authorities should be left to develop their own control solutions in line with their own Integrated Risk Management Plans (a 'rights' approach)
- If we consider that greater collaboration is needed to improve resilience (for example, enabling fire and rescue services to share data, answer each others' calls and mobilise resources), then some central intervention may be needed. This could include the provision of financial support or the making available of core products or assets originally procured for FiReControl (a 'localist' approach)
- If we think that a consistent level of resilience is required in all areas of the country, then a national approach will be more appropriate. A national approach could take the form of a national networked system such as FiReControl (a 'universal' approach)

- Or, alternatively, it could be achieved through the adoption of a common set of standards that have been set at a national level. How these can be met would then be a local choice (a 'bespoke' approach). This scenario could be combined with any of the others to increase resilience.

This spectrum of choices is summarised in Figure 5.2.

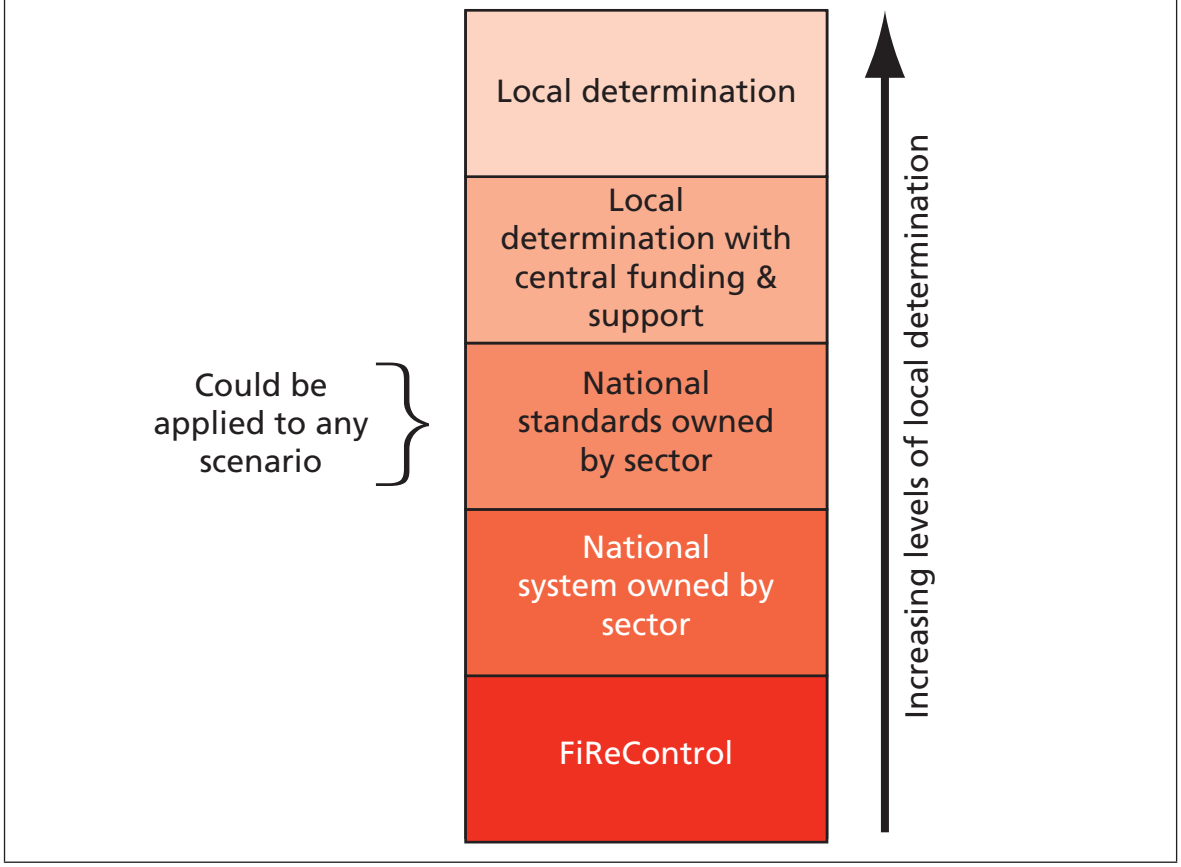
5.7 It is important to bear in mind that a national approach does not necessarily need to be led by central government. It may well make more sense for the Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers Association or a lead authority to undertake this role if they chose to do so and had the support of the fire and rescue community.

5.8 We should recognise that a 'universal' approach could, potentially, offer the highest level of resilience. However, it would be necessary to run a new procurement exercise which would result in further lengthy delays and significantly higher costs. Should fire and rescue authorities wish to re-procure a national system, the Government believes that this would need to be led by the sector and the cost would need to be shared between central government and fire and rescue authority budgets.

5.9 The Coalition Government is keen to ensure that decisions are taken at the most local level possible and, wherever practical, favours a 'rights' approach. However, in the light of the cancellation of the FiReControl project, it considers that central government should provide some financial support to fire and rescue authorities to upgrade existing control services and to try to get value from the investment in FiReControl.

5.10 The Government's preferred scenario is the 'localist' approach. This would allow fire and rescue authorities to make their own choices whilst offering limited financial support to those that wish to upgrade their controls. The Government believes that this will help authorities to increase the resilience and efficiency of their existing control rooms while, at the same time, make best use of FiReControl legacy assets and deliver value for the taxpayer. This option could, potentially, be combined with the development of national standards (a 'bespoke' approach) to improve national resilience. The Government would not expect to play a leading role in developing the standards although any work in this area should be carried out in discussion with the Civil Contingencies Secretariat in the Cabinet Office.

Figure 5.2: Scenarios and levels of local determination



Q6 Which of the approaches (or combination of approaches) for the delivery of control services, set out in this section, would provide the best outcome for the fire and rescue community and the public?

Please give reasons for your choice.

Section 6

Funding choices

6.1 This section considers a range of funding choices. The cancellation of FiReControl comes at a challenging time for public finances and the Government wants to support fire and rescue authorities that wish to make their control provision more resilient and efficient.

6.2 The Government has had to make some difficult choices in reducing the budget deficit and supporting the economic recovery. Fire and rescue budgets have not been immune from this but the Government's priority is to maintain resources to support frontline services, whilst cutting waste and improving efficiency through improved transparency.

6.3 Ministers will need to review how much additional funding will be available for control room services in the light of other funding pressures. However, in the current economic climate, it is clear that funding will be limited and that local government will need to look for further efficiency savings. This will mean being open to new ideas, new ways of working, and to greater flexibility in providing services.

Fire and rescue control room efficiency – current position

6.4 When considering funding for control services it is important to bear in mind that FiReControl has left a 'brownfield site' and that there is a direct relationship between what happens to the FiReControl assets (such as the control centre buildings) and the amount of funding that will be available to improve current control services. It will not be possible to fund all fire and rescue authorities' priorities and this will inevitably give rise to some difficult choices. An important step will be to put in place a funding mechanism which is fair, transparent, encourages innovation and eliminates waste. We are therefore inviting the fire and rescue community to help the Department to develop the principles by which any money should be allocated.

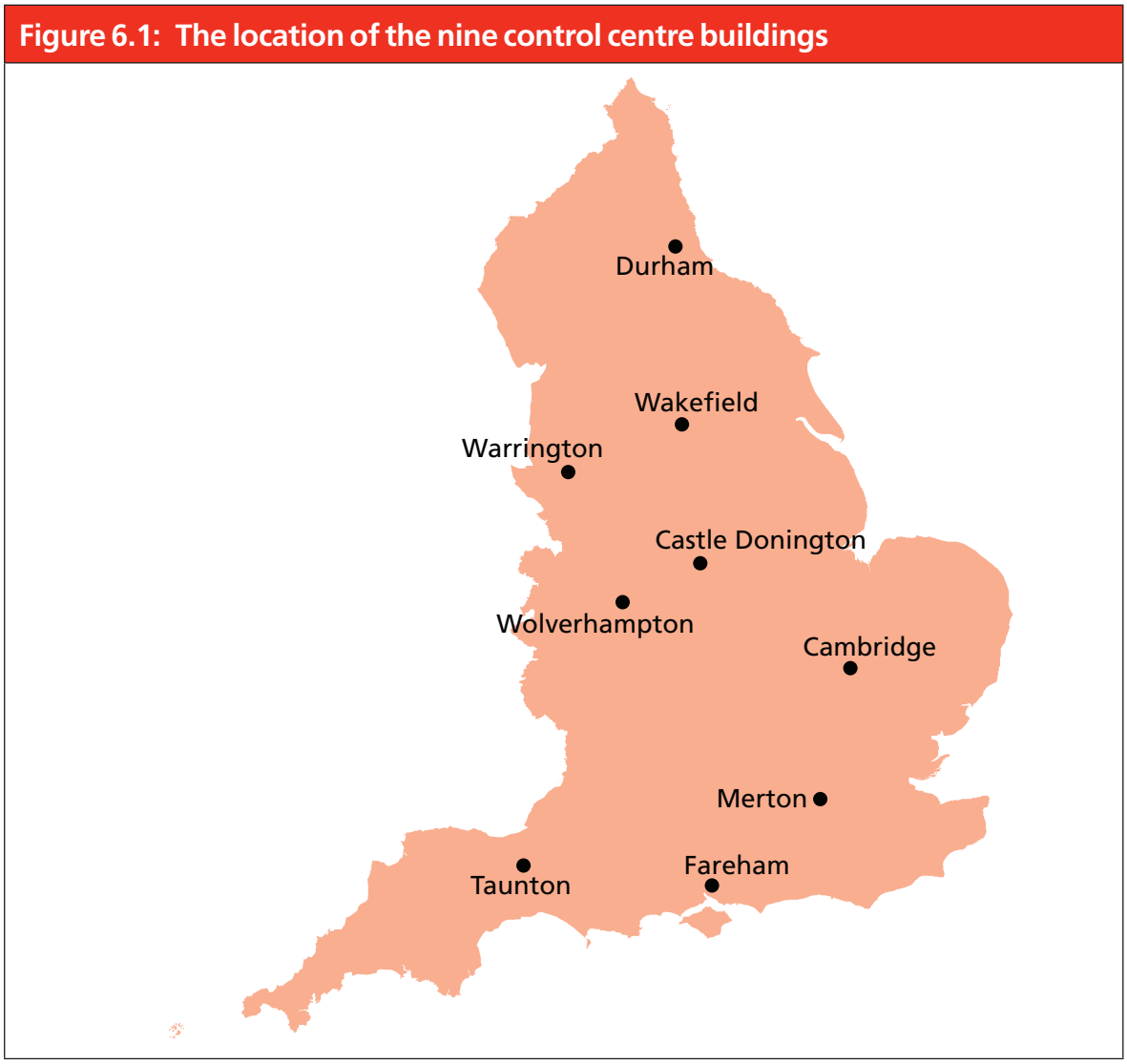
6.5 Available funding will need to cover a combination of FiReControl legacy issues and sector requests for improvements to current control services. Further details for funding proposals for each of the scenarios is set out in Annex A.

Control centre buildings

6.6 Nine bespoke control centre buildings were procured for FiReControl, through a private developer scheme, with leases of up to 25 years (see Figure 6.1). We have reached agreement in principle for the move of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority's existing control room service, together with other related functions, into the Merton control centre during 2011. This is subject to formal approval through the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority's governance channels. The Department wishes to offer first refusal on the remaining eight buildings to the fire and rescue community.

6.7 The Department hopes to enter into discussions with fire and rescue authorities that are interested in taking on (or in some cases retaining) leases during the consultation period so that decisions can be reached as soon as possible. The Department's aim is to offer the leases to fire and rescue authorities and provide a significant ongoing contribution towards the rent so that it is sustainable for the authorities and fair to the taxpayer. Sharing the cost in this way not only makes the control centre buildings affordable for fire and rescue services but increases the amount of funding available to be channelled to fire and rescue authorities for control service improvement. Should there be insufficient interest from the fire and rescue community, the Department will try to find alternative users for the buildings.

Figure 6.1: The location of the nine control centre buildings



Completion of Firelink

6.8 The Department as well as fire and rescue authorities have made a significant investment in the Firelink digital radio network. Firelink provides a national, resilient voice and data network for the fire and rescue services, using technology shared by other emergency responders. Most fire and rescue control rooms were provided with an interim means of accessing the Firelink network, in anticipation of moving to the new control centres. Now that FiReControl has been cancelled, further investment will be needed to upgrade current control rooms to secure the full Firelink benefits. A summary of the technical options for upgrading Firelink are set out in Annex C.

Supporting shared control services

6.9 Now that FiReControl has been cancelled, some fire and rescue authorities may wish to consider moving to shared control services in order to achieve improved resilience or efficiency savings. We recognise that the transition towards shared services might be financially challenging for fire and rescue authorities as this would require upfront investment before any savings were generated. However, one impact of moving to shared control services would be to reduce the total number of control rooms which require Firelink installation – and thereby cut the Firelink bill. Part of these savings could be offered to fire and rescue authorities that require support with restructuring costs.

Technology upgrades

6.10 The Department might also be able to offer financial support for technology upgrades which enhance control room resilience (regardless of whether or not fire and rescue authorities have decided to move to shared control services). However, the amount of money available for this purpose will be linked to the Department's overall spend on leases and Firelink installation costs. As discussed above, this will be dependent upon choices made by fire and rescue authorities.

Other FiReControl legacy issues

6.11 A number of fire and rescue authorities have ongoing issues with accommodation or mobilising systems which relate to decisions they took in anticipation of a move to the FiReControl network. For example, some authorities took decisions to relocate their headquarters but did not make provision for a replacement control room facility on the grounds that a standalone control function would no longer be needed. A number of fire and rescue authorities have also expressed concerns to the Department about the impact that delays to FiReControl have had on their operational continuity, and have sought additional funding to meet costs associated with maintaining their existing systems. These authorities may wish to make a case that some of the available funding should now be allocated for these purposes.

Agreeing funding priorities

6.12 In the current economic climate, it is highly unlikely that all requests for funding can be met. Funding priorities will need to be agreed which achieve a balance between operational need, fairness and value for the taxpayer. The amount of funding available for upgrading control services will be strongly influenced by fire and rescue authorities' decisions on the use of control centre buildings and moving to shared control services.

6.13 The Department's current thinking is that the order of priorities should be:

- completing the installation of Firelink as the top priority
- funding restructuring costs to support shared control services
- funding technical enhancements to improve resilience
- funding accommodation or control room infrastructure costs arising out of delays to FiReControl.

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

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.

Annex A

Scenarios for the future arrangement of control services

Scenario 1 – Minimal involvement by central government

Expected outcome

Under this scenario fire and rescue authorities have complete freedom to maintain their own control rooms or collaborate with other authorities as they decide is best to meet local needs and contribute to wider resilience. Some fire and rescue authorities may choose to continue the current standalone arrangements whilst others may wish to collaborate and take advantage of opportunities to achieve efficiencies, enhance technology and improve resilience.

Support provided by the Department

This model requires no central intervention beyond coordination and funding of the infrastructure upgrades required to secure Firelink radio benefits, such as data mobilising. The coordination role does not need necessarily to be carried out by central government as it could be carried out by the sector – for example, by the Chief Fire Officers Association or a lead authority – if the fire and rescue community wished.

Resilience

Fire and rescue authorities would be advised by their Chief Fire Officers on the resilience offered by their current control arrangements and any improvements would be a matter for local determination. It would be open to the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers Association to provide leadership and support in terms of reviewing the effectiveness of existing arrangements and making recommendations to strengthen these, if they chose to do so.

Control room technology and value for the taxpayer

Under this scenario, central government would complete the installation of Firelink in existing control rooms but any other enhanced technology would be a matter for the fire and rescue authority. Individual authorities would choose whether they wished to refresh, upgrade or replace their existing controls or indeed to share or outsource their control room services with other authorities. All costs, other than Firelink, would need to be met by the fire and rescue authority.

Use of FiReControl legacy assets and infrastructure

Under this scenario there would be no specific incentives or 'push' from central government to make best use of FiReControl legacy assets and infrastructure. The Department would seek to dispose of all FiReControl assets, either to the sector or elsewhere, with the singular aim of achieving the best financial outcome for the taxpayer.

Scenario 2 – Common standards for resilience agreed nationally

Expected outcome

This scenario establishes national standards for fire and rescue control resilience which could be developed and monitored by the sector (eg the Chief Fire Officers Association). These standards would be expressed in terms of outputs and the method for achieving compliance would be for individual fire and rescue authorities to decide. Scenario 2 includes the installation of Firelink into existing control rooms but the development of common standards could be introduced alongside any of the other three scenarios.

Some fire and rescue authorities may decide that meeting the standards for resilience could be achieved most effectively through sharing control services with another authority or agency, whilst others may decide that retaining a dedicated standalone control with improved interoperability arrangements would be sufficient. For some fire and rescue authorities – those with few requirements to mobilise to wide area incidents, and that already have modern IT infrastructure and adequate back-up arrangements – little change may be required to comply with the standards.

Support provided by the Department

The Department would provide financial support for the development of the resilience standards, with the technical and operational elements being led by the sector. In addition, the Department would provide endorsement of strategic decisions relating to the national interest.

Resilience

The introduction of standards would increase national resilience by providing a common interpretation of the statutory obligations placed upon fire and rescue authorities in respect of their control and mobilisation function.

Under this scenario common standards for resilience would underpin future working practices and ensure that all fire and rescue authorities were capable of providing, even during busy periods, an effective call handling and mobilisation service both to the public and to each other. The sector would need to consider what arrangements should be put in place to provide authorities with mutual assurance that the standards were being met.

Control room technology and value for the taxpayer

The degree to which enhanced technology and efficiencies are achieved would depend upon the approach taken by fire and rescue authorities to meet the resilience standards. The need to meet the standards should lead some authorities to take decisions that would improve both efficiency and technical functionality.

Use of FiReControl legacy assets and infrastructure

Fire and rescue authorities choosing to take on FiReControl legacy assets, such as the control centre buildings, could expect to improve the resilience of their control services as a result. This would help them to meet the new standards.

Scenario 3 – Central government incentives to support collaboration and efficiencies

Expected outcome

Under this scenario central government would offer financial support to fire and rescue authorities to encourage greater collaboration through sharing control services, and making use of the control centre buildings. In terms of collaboration, one authority may choose to provide the service on behalf of an additional one or more (an outsourced approach) or a collection of authorities could choose to share services through the establishment of a jointly-owned hub (a consortium approach).

Support provided by the Department

The Department could be expected to provide support to fire and rescue authorities broadly as indicated below:

- For fire and rescue authorities remaining as **standalone** controls, the Department could be expected to support the installation and set up of Firelink infrastructure upgrades required for data mobilisation capability.
- For fire and rescue authorities collaborating to set up **a control hub** (a shared control service), the Department could be expected to support the installation and set up of the Firelink infrastructure. In addition, a proportion of the avoided Firelink costs (ie costs saved as a result of not installing Firelink into separate standalone controls) could be made available to support transition costs associated with collaboration.
- For fire and rescue authorities collaborating to set up **a shared control within a control centre building**, the Department could be expected to make available funding as above and, in addition, agree mutually acceptable terms on a contribution towards the ongoing costs of the control centre building.

Resilience

Where a shared control service operates from one of the control centre buildings its constituent fire and rescue authorities would benefit from increased resilience due to the high specification and physical security of the buildings. Increased collaboration could also lead to improvements in resilience as control hubs could typically be expected to adopt technically advanced systems and would operate across a wider geographical area providing a seamless mobilisation of the resources of more than one fire and rescue service.

However, collaboration also has the potential for increasing risk by creating single points of failure which affect more people. This puts greater pressure on ensuring adequate back-up and fallback arrangements are in place – the adequacy of such arrangements is something that fire and rescue authorities would need to consider.

Control room technology and value for the taxpayer

For every reduction in the number of standalone control rooms, the significant cost of installation (and ongoing annual service fees) of Firelink equipment to enable data mobilising is avoided. This has the potential for freeing up money to be invested elsewhere – for example in supporting fire and rescue services in transitioning to a consolidated control service.

Shared controls could be operated from within existing fire and rescue accommodation or could be housed within the control centres procured as part of the FiReControl project.

Where fire and rescue authorities decide to operate from one of the control centre buildings, the Department would enter into discussions with the relevant authorities to discuss lease ownership and contributions to the building running costs. The intention would be to reach a position which provides a fair deal for the fire and rescue authorities and recovers as much as possible for the taxpayer.

There would also be potential for the Department to provide fire and rescue authorities with access to materials and products developed for FiReControl, and framework contracts could be set up to achieve economies of scale for the authorities that wish to take this up.

Use of FiReControl legacy assets and infrastructure

Under this scenario there would be significant opportunities for the fire and rescue community to make use of the FiReControl legacy assets and infrastructure as described above.

Scenario 4 – A nationally agreed, common system for control rooms developed under the leadership of a single organisation

Expected outcome

Under this scenario a national system for control services would be created by deploying a common IT solution and adopting common ways of working. The new system would probably utilise some of the bespoke control centres procured as part of the FiReControl project.

Support provided by the Department

This scenario would most likely be sector led (eg by the Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers Association or a lead authority). Central government's role would be limited to the provision of part-funding and providing endorsement of strategic decisions relating to the national interest.

Investment in infrastructure to deliver Firelink data mobilisation capability would be deferred until the new common approach had been specified to avoid unnecessary expenditure. In the interim, fire and rescue authorities would need to maintain their current control rooms, or share or outsource services, without specific financial support from central government.

Resilience

A single control and mobilisation system for fire and rescue services operating across England could be expected to offer a higher level of resilience than the other three scenarios. Potentially, a common system could, if networked, provide information on the status and location of all resources nationally, thereby improving the coordination of support for major incidents. However, funding would not be available to support improvements to current control rooms (such as the completion of Firelink) and this would therefore delay improvements in resilience and capability in the short term.

Control room technology and value for the taxpayer

This approach would require considerable investment in new systems and, given the history of the FiReControl project, would introduce a significant element of risk. It is likely to be the most expensive option and fire and rescue authorities would need to contribute

towards the development costs. Ongoing costs for fire and rescue authorities would depend upon the level of control room efficiencies that could be achieved, including the overall number of staff employed to operate the new system. These would be matters for fire and rescue authorities to determine rather than central government.

Use of FiReControl legacy assets and infrastructure

This option is likely to make good use of both the FiReControl legacy assets and the investment in learning made since the project was initiated.

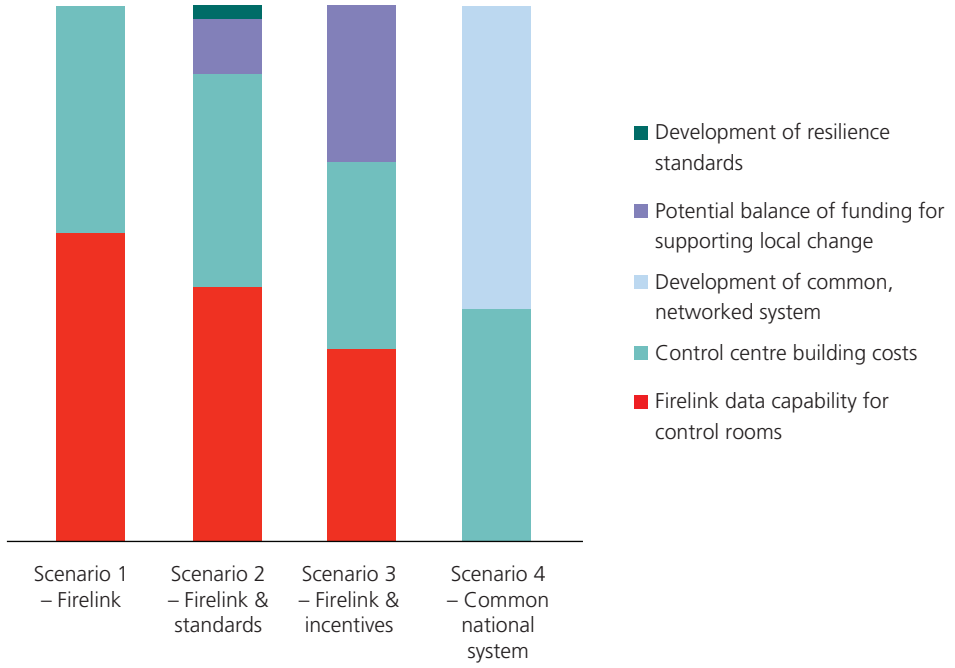
Comparison of the scenarios

Figure A1 identifies the principal areas of costs and funding associated with each of the scenarios during the next four years (the Spending Review period). Scenarios 1–3 all assume that fire and rescue authorities will continue to operate local controls and Scenario 4 assumes that these are replaced by a national system.

There will be a finite amount of funding available for all scenarios. For Scenarios 1–3 this would need to cover the costs of all the control centre buildings and installing Firelink into all fire and rescue control rooms which will continue to operate in the future. For Scenario 4 the available funding would need to meet the costs of the buildings and the procurement of a new national system with any shortfall being met by fire and rescue authorities.

Figure A1 compares the potential funding implications of the scenarios and illustrates the impact that decisions taken by fire and rescue authorities could have upon the amount of funding available to authorities to support local change.

Figure A1: Indicative distribution of costs/funding under different scenarios



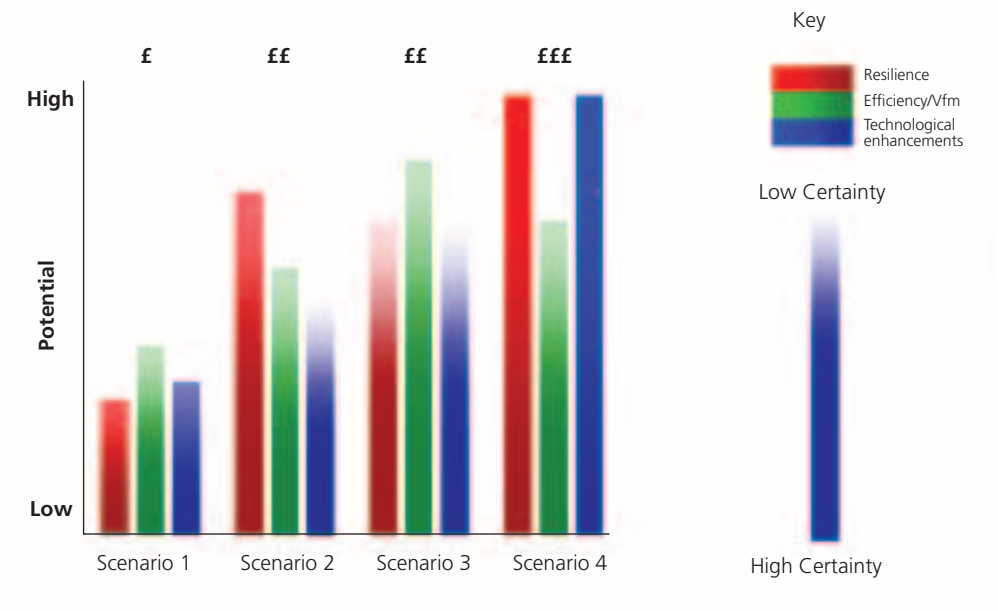
With Scenario 1, there may be relatively little change from current control room arrangements and most of the available funding would be spent on completing Firelink and meeting the control centre building costs.

Should the sector decide to introduce resilience standards (Scenario 2) this could be expected to create an impetus for change. Some fire and rescue authorities may decide to close their current control rooms and move to more modern and efficient shared controls and, where this is cost effective, they may also decide to operate the shared service from a control centre building. This would have the impact of reducing the requirement for Firelink installation thereby freeing up funding to support local change.

Scenario 3 involves central government enabling fire and rescue authorities that wish to move to shared controls to use some of the avoided Firelink costs in meeting any restructuring costs. The Department would also seek to reach a financial agreement with groups of fire and rescue authorities that wished to take on the leases of control centre buildings. This would free up more funding to support local change.

Under Scenario 4 the investment in Firelink would be deferred until the new national arrangements had been procured, developed and implemented. Any funding available over the medium term would need to be invested in the buildings and in supporting the costs of developing the new system – although this is unlikely to meet the full costs and contributions from fire and rescue authorities would probably be needed.

Figure A: Indicative potential to achieve policy objectives



Because any decisions on how these scenarios would be implemented would be taken locally, the outcomes in terms of resilience, efficiency and enhanced control service technology cannot be stated with any certainty. Figure A2 illustrates the potential of each scenario to contribute to these objectives.

This suggests that with Scenario 1 there would be limited incremental improvements to resilience, efficiency and enhanced technology as some fire and rescue authorities decide to improve and rationalise their controls.

The introduction of standards agreed by all fire and rescue authorities as part of Scenario 2 could be expected to lead to a step change in resilience. Compliance with the new standards might also lead authorities to accelerate activities which are designed to improve control service technology and efficiency.

Scenario 3 includes incentives for fire and rescue authorities to share control services. This will result in efficiencies and release more funding for local change. Fire and rescue authorities could be expected to use this funding to upgrade control technology and introduce new measures to increase resilience.

Scenario 4, which is most similar to the FiReControl approach, would introduce brand new technology and provide the highest level of resilience. However, implementation costs would be high and there would be considerable uncertainty around the running costs and level of efficiencies that could be achieved until the details of the new system were known.

Annex B

FiReControl legacy assets

The following assets were procured as part of the FiReControl project and may be of future value to the fire and rescue community. Arrangements will need to be put in place to determine future ownership, maintenance and support.

Control centre buildings

Nine control centre buildings were procured through a private developer scheme with leases of 20 or 25 years in locations around England (see Figure 6.1). These are high quality buildings designed to comply with a broad range of resilience criteria in terms of their location, security and building services. The buildings were completed between 2007 and 2010 and, due in part to their highly resilient specification, the rental costs are at a premium level. The buildings have been fitted out with basic IT and furniture and, in addition, are fully equipped with industrial kitchens and catering equipment. Three of the buildings are furnished with large screens and consoles for operational use.

Firelink

Four of the control centre buildings have been fitted with radio equipment (SAN H) and a further three are currently on order or at various stages of installation. This equipment provides a fully functional, resilient interface with the Airwave digital radio network which was procured for the fire and rescue services as part of the Fire and Resilience Programme. Firelink enables the mobilisation of resources via data messaging which is more efficient and reliable than voice messaging.

Onboard computers (mobile data terminals)

Mobile data terminals are computers which are mounted in fire appliances and hold a variety of operational information to assist firefighters in carrying out their duties safely and effectively. Around 1700 onboard computers were fitted to fire appliances in England through the Firelink project, with the software to be provided later by FiReControl. A non-networked version of the software is currently available and in use in 25 fire and rescue services.

To facilitate the training of firefighters in the use of onboard computers, the Department also procured 143 training toughbooks (rugged laptops). There is the potential for these to be used by fire and rescue services as an alternative to existing onboard computers, although allocation, support and licensing arrangements would need to be developed.

Station end equipment

Station end equipment is the system found in each local fire station that receives mobilising messages from the control room. The system is used to inform fire crews of the details of incidents so they can respond to them. By the end of March 2011 installation of this equipment will have been completed in eight fire and rescue services, covering around 270 local stations.

Data capture and migration toolkit

This comprises the software and hardware delivered as part of the FiReControl project to support fire and rescue services in preparing and migrating their data into a consistent format suitable for the FiReControl network. There are approximately 270 PCs and 45 servers deployed within fire and rescue services for this purpose.

Portable geographical positioning system (GPS) navigation and messaging device (TomTom)

The Department has procured 1500 TomTom satellite navigation devices as part of the FiReControl project with the expectation that these would support a solution for mobilising fire and rescue officers.

Mobilising system

One of the main components of the FiReControl solution comprised the mobilising and resource management system which was being developed by Intergraph. Further work could be carried out to complete the development of this system if there was sufficient interest from the fire and rescue community

Annex C

Summary of technical options for further use of Firelink

Introduction

With the exception of London, and two fire and rescue services that were already users of the Airwave network, a simplified solution was installed in all other control rooms in England using SAN-I equipment. This was intended to be an interim solution, pending migration of the fire and rescue services to the new control centres where full, resilient access to Firelink would be provided. The SAN-I solution has proved to be effective in operation, albeit providing only basic voice functionality.

With the cancellation of the FiReControl project, fire and rescue services could gain further benefits from the Firelink system through a number of options. These are described below. The list of options is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather to illustrate the choices that could be made in terms of cost and functionality.

Option 1 – Do the minimum and continue with the existing solution

In this option, the SAN-I equipment would be retained, and any remaining technical issues resolved. No changes to existing control room or mobile data systems would be required. This is the lowest cost option but delivers no additional benefits to the fire and rescue services. The control rooms concerned would continue to have no access to Firelink data services nor to advanced voice functionality – although mobile data could be supported using commercial networks. The connection would remain less resilient than a full networked connection to Firelink.

Option 2 – Upgrade the existing solution to support data

In this option, the SAN-I equipment would be upgraded to allow access to Firelink data services. To make beneficial use of the Firelink data services, upgrades would be required to both control room systems (provision of a mobile data gateway and associated changes to the mobilisation system) and mobile data systems on fire appliances.

This option would provide the fire and rescue services with a resilient mobile data bearer with high geographic coverage – for example, for reporting the status and location of appliances, and for transmitting mobilisation and incident messages. The fire and rescue services would not have access to advanced voice functionality, and the connection would remain less resilient than a full networked connection.

Option 3 – Implement a full networked voice and data connection to Firelink in existing control rooms

In this option, the SAN-I equipment would be replaced with a networked connection to Firelink, offering full, resilient access to Firelink voice and data functionality. Significant upgrades would be required to control room systems (including an upgrade or replacement of the integrated communication control system (ICCS), provision of a mobile data gateway and associated changes to the mobilisation system) and to mobile data systems on fire appliances.

This option would allow fire and rescue services to take full advantage of the features provided by Firelink. However, this is a relatively high cost option – although the cost would be reduced if fewer control rooms needed to be equipped (for example, through fire and rescue services sharing control rooms).

Option 4 – Use Firelink connections in control centre buildings

Network connections to Firelink are installed and tested in four control centre buildings – South West, East Midlands, North East and London. In West Midlands and South East the connections are expected to be available in 2011. The remainder could be made available in 2012. These connections offer full, resilient access to Firelink voice and data functionality. Where one or more fire and rescue service choose to re-locate their control rooms to one of the new control centre buildings, the Firelink connections would be available for use.

For other services that do not occupy the control centre buildings, one of the other options would need to be adopted.

Implementation

Connections to the Firelink network would have to be implemented by Airwave, under the Firelink contract. However, there are choices to be made as to how to implement changes to control rooms and mobile data systems on fire appliances. For example, the work could be specified and procured independently by each fire and rescue service, or, to reduce the number of separate procurement activities, a framework contract and standard specification could be developed.

Annex D

Impact assessment

Title:	
The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms Lead department or agency: **Department for Communities and Local Government**	**IA No:** **Date:** 15/12/2010 **Stage:** Consultation **Source of intervention:** Domestic **Type of measure:** **Contact for enquiries:** Toby Robinson

Summary: Intervention and Options

What is the problem under consideration? Why is government intervention necessary?

The FiReControl project, initiated in 2004, has been cancelled due to delays to the IT delivery. This project aimed to replace England's 46 standalone fire and rescue control rooms with a national network of nine regional control centres to improve the fire and rescue authorities ability to handle emergency calls. DCLG is now consulting the fire and rescue community on what, if anything, should replace FiReControl; who should take the lead in delivering any change; and priorities for the allocation of any central resources. This consultation presents four possible scenarios. It is currently difficult to be precise about the economic impacts these will have as this will, to a large extent, depend upon decisions taken by individual fire and rescue authorities but a further Impact Assessment will be produced after the consultation and before any implementation commences.

What are the policy objectives and the intended effects?

The policy objectives for FiReControl were improving the resilience and efficiency of fire and rescue emergency control services through enhanced technology. Ministers believe that these are still the right objectives for the future but wish to consult the fire and rescue community on their priorities and seek their views on how these policy objectives can best be met. The intended effects include: improving control service resilience and efficiency and providing enhanced technology; securing the benefits of investment in the Firelink radio infrastructure through enabling data communications and ensuring the best use of the FiReControl project's legacy assets including the nine control centre buildings.

What policy options have been considered? Please justify preferred option (further details in Evidence Base)

In line with the Coalition Government's localist approach DCLG intends to consult the fire and rescue community on four scenarios. These are:

1) do minimum – complete Firelink only
2) complete Firelink and introduce a national set of performance standards to improve resilience
3) complete Firelink and provide central resources to incentivise improvements in resilience and efficiency
4) re-procure a new national IT system.

Ministers' preference is for Option 3 as this will achieve the best overall outcome in terms of the policy objectives and use of FiReControl legacy assets. However, Ministers do not wish to impose a solution and no decisions on the allocation of funding will be taken until the after the consultation.

When will the policy be reviewed to establish its impact and the extent to which the policy objectives have been achieved?	To be confirmed
Are there arrangements in place that will allow a systematic collection of monitoring information for future policy review?	No

I have read the Impact Assessment and I am satisfied that, given the available evidence, it represents a reasonable view of the likely costs, benefits and impact of the leading options.

Signed by the DCLG Chief Economist:..... Date: 10 January 2011

Summary: Analysis and evidence

Policy Option 1

Description: Do minimum approach. DCLG support Firelink radio upgrades but take no further role.

Price Base Year **2011**	PV Base Year **2011**	Time Period Years **10**	Net Benefit (Present Value (PV)) (£m)		
			Low: **£0m**	High: **£0m**	Best Estimate: £0m

COSTS (£m)	**Total Transition** (Constant Price)	Years	**Average Annual** (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	£57m		£18m	**£210m**
High	£104m		£18m	**£255m**
Best Estimate	£94m		£18m	**£246m**

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

The transition costs relate to Firelink infrastructure upgrades. The cost is based upon assessment provided by technical advisors. This would be a DCLG cost and much of it would be met through grant funding.

The recurring costs are building costs. The total costs of all nine of the buildings are £18m per annum (£12m rent and £6m for other costs). The costs of the buildings are expected to be met in full by the public sector, although DCLG contribution to costs is expected to reduce from the current level of 100 per cent.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

Fire and rescue authorities may need or choose to invest in securing control room infrastructure improvements and/or efficiency improvements. It is not possible to estimate the quantifiable cost of this at this stage.

BENEFITS (£m)	**Total Transition** (Constant Price)	Years	**Average Annual** (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	0		£4m	**£27m**
High	0		£7m	**£43m**
Best Estimate	0		£5m	**£36m**

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

Recurring benefits are the estimated level of staffing efficiencies that might be achieved through local collaboration. There are four fire and rescue authorities already known to be actively pursuing shared control room options, others would be expected to follow suit. For FiReControl estimated staff savings across all of England's fire and rescue authorities were calculated. The estimate applied to this option is that 30 per cent of these might be achieved, ramping up over three years.

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

Full Firelink functionality achieved in terms of data message mobilisation capability and increased potential for fire and rescue authorities to become more interoperable in their control room operations. It is not possible at this stage to monetise the benefits to society of this investment although data mobilisation is a quicker and more reliable form of communication between a fire and rescue authority control room and frontline services (compared to voice communication).

Key assumptions/sensitivities/risks Discount rate (%)	3.5 (3.5)

A prudent assumption has been applied with regards to expected Firelink costs. It is assumed that all of England's fire and rescue authorities would request the upgrades necessary to support the realisation of Firelink benefits in full. It is further assumed that an expected percentage reduction in staff costs arising from local investment in collaborating does not equal the same percentage reduction in Firelink costs as the breakdown of fixed and variable element is not known. Estimate is based upon midpoint of Firelink cost estimate range which assumes 42 fire and rescue authorities require investment.

Without any additional financial support improvements in resilience will take longer to achieve and there is a significant risk that smaller fire and rescue authorities will continue to be overwhelmed during incidents which prompt a high volume of calls. This may result in responses to calls being delayed or even calls missed altogether.

Summary: Analysis and evidence

Policy Option 2

Description: Common standards of resilience agreed nationally

Price Base Year **2011**	PV Base Year **2011**	Time Period Years **10**	Net Benefit (Present Value (PV)) (£m)		
			Low: **£0m**	High: **£0m**	Best Estimate: £0m

COSTS (£m)	**Total Transition** (Constant Price)	Years	**Average Annual** (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	£48m		£18m	**£201m**
High	£88m		£18m	**£240m**
Best Estimate	£80m		£18m	**£232m**

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

The transition costs relate to Firelink infrastructure upgrades. The cost is based upon assessment provided by technical advisors. This would be a DCLG cost and much of it would be met through grant funding.

The cost is estimated to be less than Option 1 due to the expected impact of introducing standards – it is expected that this would incentivise more fire and rescue authorities to share control services and therefore reduce the overall cost of the Firelink programme (less controls to upgrade = lower cost).

A cost estimate has been included for the costs of developing the resilience standards. This cost is likely to fall to DCLG, although much of it may be grant funded to the sector.

The recurring costs are building costs. The total costs of all nine of the buildings are £18m per annum (£12m rent and £6m for other costs). The costs of the buildings are expected to be met in full by the public sector, although DCLG contribution to costs is expected to reduce from the current level of 100 per cent.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

None identified at this stage.

BENEFITS (£m)	**Total Transition** (Constant Price)	Years	**Average Annual** (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	0		£4m	**£32m**
High	0		£8m	**£51m**
Best Estimate	0		£5m	**£43m**

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

The recurring benefits are the estimated level of staffing efficiencies that might be achieved through local collaboration under this option. There are fire and rescue authorities already known to be actively pursuing shared control room options, others would be expected to follow suit. The estimate is that circa 35 per cent of FiReControl Business Case staff cost saving is achieved as a result of local fire and rescue authorities choosing to collaborate in running their control services. This estimate would be revisited following the consultation when more clarity can be reasonably expected on fire and rescue authority plans.

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

Resilience benefits are not monetised.

Full Firelink functionality achieved in terms of data message mobilisation capability and increased potential for fire and rescue authorities to become more interoperable in their control room operations. It is not possible at this stage to monetise the benefits of this investment although data mobilisation is a quicker and more reliable form of communication between a fire and rescue authority control room and frontline services (compared to voice communication).

The introduction of resilience standards would result in increased levels of preparedness for call handling arrangements during major incidents and periods when infrastructure and systems become unavailable.

Key assumptions/sensitivities/risks Discount rate (%)	3.5 (3.5)

The introduction of standards would have the effect of incentivising a small number of fire and rescue authorities to collaborate and/or use the control centre buildings to support meeting the standards.

Prudent assumption with regards to expected Firelink costs. Assumed that all fire and rescue authorities would request upgrades necessary to support the realisation of Firelink benefits in full.

Assumed that an expected percentage reduction in staff costs does not equal same percentage reduction in Firelink costs as the breakdown of fixed and variable element for the Firelink costs is not known.

Summary: Analysis and evidence

Policy Option 3

Description: Provide central resources to incentivise improvements in resilience and efficiency.

Price Base Year **2011**	PV Base Year **2011**	Time Period Years **10**	Net Benefit (Present Value (PV)) (£m)		
			Low: **£0m**	High: **£0m**	Best Estimate: £0m

COSTS (£m)	**Total Transition** (Constant Price)	Years	**Average Annual** (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	£48m		£18m	**£201m**
High	£78m		£18m	**£230m**
Best Estimate	£71m		£18m	**£223m**

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

The transition costs relate principally to Firelink infrastructure upgrades. This would be a DCLG cost and much of it would be met through grant funding. The Firelink cost is estimated to be less than Options 1 and 2 due to the expected impact of providing financial incentive and support for collaboration. It is expected that this would incentivise more fire and rescue authorities to share control services and therefore reduce the overall cost of the Firelink programme (less controls to upgrade = lower cost). The breakdown of the Firelink costs between fixed and variable is not known at this stage and therefore a prudent estimate of the reduction in Firelink costs has been applied (25 per cent reduction compared to Option 1).

The recurring costs are building costs. The total costs of all nine of the buildings are £18m per annum (£12m rent and £6m for other costs). The costs of the buildings are assumed to be met in full with public funds, although DCLG contribution to costs is expected to reduce from the current level of 100 per cent.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

Funding to support fire and rescue authorities secure efficiencies and improvements to their resilience is as yet unquantified.

BENEFITS (£m)	**Total Transition** (Constant Price)	Years	**Average Annual** (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	0		£6m	**£46m**
High	0		£11m	**£73m**
Best Estimate	0		£7m	**£61m**

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

Recurring benefits are the estimated level of staffing efficiencies that might be achieved through local collaboration under this option. There are four fire and rescue authorities already known to be actively pursuing shared control room options, others would be expected to follow suit. Given the financial incentives to be provided with this option the estimate is 50 per cent of FiReControl Business Case staff cost saving would be achieved, ramping up over three years.

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

Resilience benefits are not monetised.

This option would potentially lead to greater competition amongst the supplier market for fire and rescue control systems.

Full Firelink functionality achieved in terms of data mobilisation capability and increased interoperability potential. The public could expect the fire and rescue authorities to provide improved response capability as a result of improvements to resilience arising from collaboration, greater use of the buildings and local changes to arrangements encouraged with central funding.

Key assumptions/sensitivities/risks Discount rate (%)	3.5 (3.5)

The assessment of which fire and rescue authorities might collaborate could prove materially inaccurate.

Prudent assumption with regards to expected Firelink costs. Assumed that all fire and rescue authorities would request upgrades necessary to support the realisation of Firelink benefits in full.

Assumed that an expected percentage reduction in staff costs does not equal same percentage reduction in Firelink costs as the breakdown of fixed and variable element of the Firelink costs is not known.

Summary: Analysis and evidence

Policy Option 4

Description: Re-procure a new national IT system for fire and rescue authority control services

Price Base Year **2011**	PV Base Year **2011**	Time Period Years **10**	Net Benefit (Present Value (PV)) (£m)		
			Low: **£0m**	High: **£0m**	Best Estimate: £0m

COSTS (£m)	**Total Transition** (Constant Price)	Years	**Average Annual** (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	**Total Cost** (Present Value)
Low	£156m		£22m	**£328m**
High	£234m		£26m	**£430m**
Best Estimate	£185m		£23m	**£365m**

Description and scale of key monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

Transition costs are made up of 'local change', 'central project team' and 'IT' costs. Estimates are based upon experience of FiReControl but are assumed to be less due to localist approach and adoption of significant amounts of FiReControl products, learning and intellectual property.

The recurring costs are building costs. The total costs of all nine of the buildings are £18m per annum (£12m rent and £6m for other costs). The costs of the buildings are expected to be met in full by the public sector, although DCLG contribution to costs is expected to reduce from the current level of 100 per cent.

Recurring costs also include expected annual increase in IT costs for a common national system which is based upon FiReControl business case data.

Other key non-monetised costs by 'main affected groups'

None identified at this stage.

BENEFITS (£m)	**Total Transition** (Constant Price)	Years	**Average Annual** (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	**Total Benefit** (Present Value)
Low	Optional		Optional	**Optional**
High	Optional		Optional	**Optional**
Best Estimate	0		£11m	**£84m**

Description and scale of key monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'

The expected staffing efficiency saving that would have been achievable under the FiReControl national network has been applied to this option, ramping up over three years but not commencing until the final year of implementation (Year 3).

Other key non-monetised benefits by 'main affected groups'	
Resilience benefits are not monetised. The level of resilience benefits that could potentially be achieved with a common national system is high (and highest with this option).	
Key assumptions/sensitivities/risks Discount rate (%)	3.5 (3.5)
There is considerable delivery risk associated with this option. It is assumed that any shortfall in funding for meeting the costs of this option would be met by fire and rescue authorities. It is assumed that a lead fire and rescue authority, Chief Fire Officers Association or another sector group (eg Local Government Association) would take the lead in procurement and delivery. It is not assumed that all the control centre buildings would be used as part of the network.	

Enforcement, implementation and wider impacts

What is the geographic coverage of the policy/option?			England		
From what date will the policy be implemented?			01/04/2011		
Which organisation(s) will enforce the policy?			Statutory responsibility sits with the fire and rescue authority		
What is the annual change in enforcement cost (£m)?			N/A		
Does enforcement comply with Hampton principles?					
Does implementation go beyond minimum EU requirements?					
What is the CO_2 equivalent change in greenhouse gas emissions? (Million tonnes CO_2 equivalent)			**Traded:**	**Non-traded:**	
Does the proposal have an impact on competition?			No		
What proportion (%) of Total PV costs/benefits is directly attributable to primary legislation, if applicable?			**Costs:**	**Benefits:**	
Annual cost (£m) per organisation (excl. Transition) (Constant Price)	**Micro**	**< 20**	**Small**	**Medium**	**Large**
Are any of these organisations exempt?	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No	Yes/No

Specific Impact Tests: Checklist

Set out in the table below where information on any Specific Impact Tests undertaken as part of the analysis of the policy options can be found in the evidence base.

Please note this checklist is not intended to list each and every statutory consideration that departments should take into account when deciding which policy option to follow. It is the responsibility of departments to make sure that their duties are complied with.

Does your policy option/proposal have an impact on…?	**Impact**	**Page ref within IA**
Statutory equality duties[12] Statutory Equality Duties Impact Test guidance	No	
Economic impacts		
Competition Competition Assessment Impact Test guidance	No	
Small firms Small Firms Impact Test guidance	No	
Environmental impacts		
Greenhouse gas assessment Greenhouse Gas Assessment Impact Test guidance	No	
Wider environmental issues Wider Environmental Issues Impact Test guidance	No	
Social impacts		
Health and well-being Health and Well-being Impact Test guidance	No	
Human rights Human Rights Impact Test guidance	No	
Justice system Justice Impact Test guidance	No	
Rural proofing Rural Proofing Impact Test guidance	No	
Sustainable development Sustainable Development Impact Test guidance	No	

[12] Race, disability and gender Impact assessments are statutory requirements for relevant policies. Equality statutory requirements will be expanded 2011, once the Equality Bill comes into force. Statutory equality duties part of the Equality Bill apply to GB only. The Toolkit provides advice on statutory equality duties for public authorities with a remit in Northern Ireland.

Evidence Base (for summary sheets) – Notes

Use this space to set out the relevant references, evidence, analysis and detailed narrative from which you have generated your policy options or proposal. Please fill in **References** section.

References

Include the links to relevant legislation and publications, such as public impact assessment of earlier stages (e.g. Consultation, Final, Enactment).

No.	Legislation or publication
1	Consultation on the future of fire and rescue control services in England (January 2011)
2	The Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008-11 http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/nationalframework200811/
3	The Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/21/contents
4	Facing the Challenge – Chief Fire and Rescue Advisor review into summer 2007 floods http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/fire/pdf/725360.pdf
5	Communities and Local Government Select Committee Report on FiReControl (April 2010) http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcomloc.htm
6	The Future of Fire and Rescue Service Control Rooms in England and Wales: Update 2003 http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/futurecontrolrooms

Evidence Base (for summary sheets)

Overview

Background

1. The FiReControl project was formally initiated by the previous Government in 2004 as part of DCLG's Fire and Resilience Programme. Its objectives set out in a report by Mott MacDonald (latest version is the update prepared in 2003) were to improve efficiency and capability of fire and rescue emergency control services (999 call handling) and resilience. FiReControl was intended to replace the 46 fire and rescue authority standalone emergency control rooms with a network of nine regional control centres, each capable of answering the others' calls and mobilising and coordinating Fire and Rescue Authority resources throughout England. The project, which was behind schedule and over-budget has now been cancelled due to delays in delivering the IT. DCLG is carrying out a consultation with the fire and rescue community to consider what should replace FiReControl; who should take the lead in delivering any change; and, what the priorities should be for the allocation of any central resources.

   Central funding available in the Comprehensive Spending Review 10 will need to cover:

   - **Rental on the nine regional control centre buildings** – DCLG has signed 20 and 25 year leases on the nine regional control centres and this funding will need to cover the whole of the rent on these buildings for the Comprehensive Spending Review 10 period unless the leases are transferred to fire and rescue authorities or a third party
   - **Costs associated with the completion of the Firelink project** – Firelink is FiReControl's sister project which provided fire and rescue authorities with a resilient, digital radio network. A simplified Firelink solution has been installed in the 43 fire and rescue authority control rooms which did not have the full Firelink solution. This was intended to be an interim solution pending migration of fire and rescue authorities to the new control centres (which would provide full, resilient access to Firelink). Following the cancellation of FiReControl it is now proposed that DCLG should meet the costs of upgrading the Firelink solution in the fire and rescue authority control rooms
   - Any remaining funds could be channelled into upgrading existing fire and rescue authority control rooms

Options

2. The consultation seeks views on four possible options. These reflect a spectrum of outcomes based on DCLG's decentralisation policy. The options are:

   1) FRAs continue to maintain their own control rooms. No central funding is available apart from completion of Firelink. DCLG disposes of control centre buildings to the highest bidder – unlikely to be a fire and rescue authority)

2) Performance standards are developed to improve resilience. DCLG would fund any development work but the standards would be developed and monitored by the sector and the means of compliance would be individual fire and rescue authorities. This option could be combined with all other options

3) Financial incentives are put in place designed to encourage greater collaboration between fire and rescue authorities through sharing of existing control rooms and making use of the nine control centre buildings. A proportion of any savings on Firelink installation, achieved as result of fire and rescue authority decisions to merge or outsource their control services, will be passed on to fire and rescue authorities to help meet their restructuring costs (e.g. redundancy payments). Similarly, should fire and rescue authorities decide to occupy the control centre buildings and take on the leases, their contribution to the rent will deliver a 'saving' to the Department which can be passed on to the fire and rescue authorities to invest in their existing controls

4) A new national IT system is procured with costs shared between DCLG and the fire and rescue authorities. It is assumed that this would eventually result in the occupation of some of the regional control centre buildings and that the majority of existing control rooms would close down. However, this option would take a number of years to deliver and there would be no direct impact on building usage or costs during Comprehensive Spending Review 10.

3. It is difficult to be precise about the economic impacts that these options will have for several reasons:

- they are dependent on decisions taken by individual fire and rescue authorities
- the benefits from greater resilience cannot be easily monetised (and have not been in this impact assessment)
- ongoing efficiencies that arise from consolidating control rooms are offset by one-off transition costs, making any overall assessment sensitive to the time horizon over which the assessment is made.

4. In addition, some costs will depend on discussions with suppliers. To protect DCLG's commercial position detailed cost estimates have not been published in the impact assessment. A full impact assessment will be published once any necessary procurement processes and commercial discussions have taken place and this will also include any revisions to cost estimates that arise out of the consultation. We would also welcome any views on the appropriate time horizon over which different options should be assessed.

Problem under consideration:

5. The 46 standalone fire and rescue authority control rooms in England which require significant on-going investment. There is a broad disparity between the control rooms as each has differing levels of technology, call handling capacity and emergency back-up arrangements.

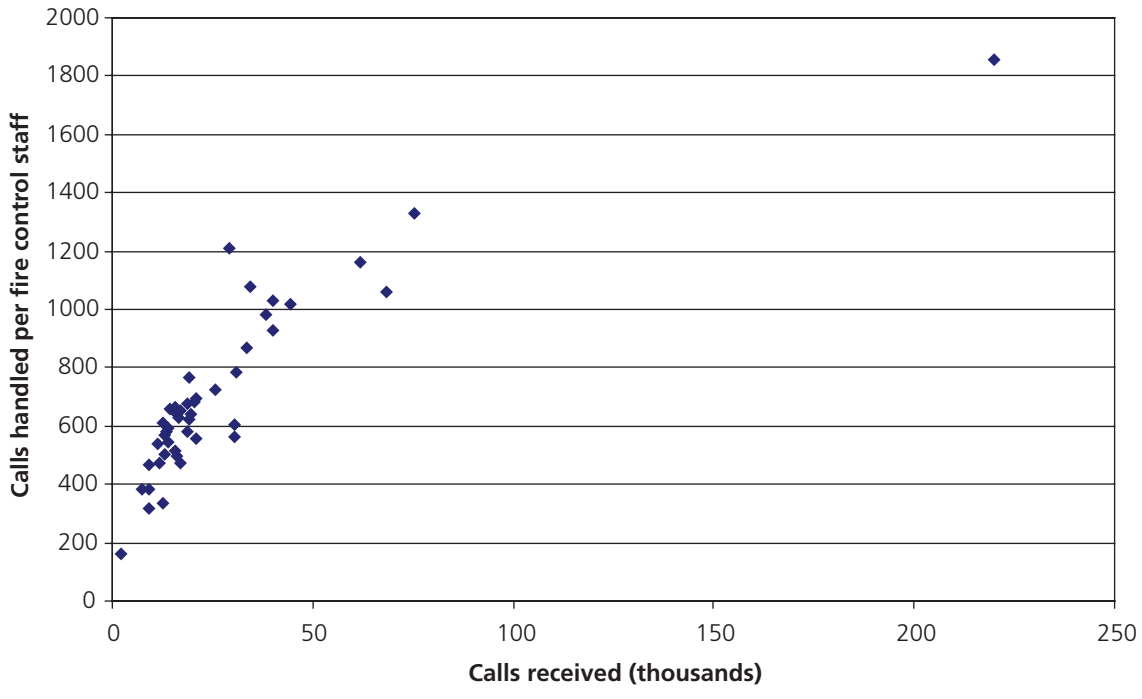
6. England faces a complex range of threats ranging from terrorism to large scale accidents or natural hazards and existing control service arrangements can come under severe pressure when faced with these rare but extreme events. Current control rooms are not networked so any overspill of calls is dealt with by implementing limited 'buddy' arrangements between other control rooms or emergency services, whereby the calls are diverted to other, nominated, control rooms by 999 operators. The processes for dealing with overflowed calls are often manually intensive which gives rise to problems at times of extreme demand, such as occur during flooding, or if the control rooms experience technical failure. This can result in delays to calls being responded to or even calls being missed. The Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser (Sir Ken Knight) identified some of the issues in his review into the fire service response to the 2007 summer floods, *Facing the Challenge*.The table below provides an indication of some of the major incidents that have occurred in the UK in the past five years.

Date	Place	Type	Fatalities	Injured	Notes
2005	Hemel Hempstead	Fire/ Explosion	0	43	11 December: Three explosions caused a massive fire that destroyed the northern half of the 100 acre Buncefield oil depot. Tanks contained a variety of fuels – unleaded, super unleaded motor spirit, gas oil and ultra low sulphur diesel (excluding aviation fuel). (Source: newspaper reports)
2005	North Yorkshire	Floods	0	0	19 June: Two hours of torrential rain during freak thunder storm resulted in flash floods over several villages on the North York Moors. (Source: newspaper reports)
2005	England/ Scotland/Wales	Storms/ floods	?	?	January: Severe storms caused widespread flooding, especially in Carlisle and with hurricane force winds causing much damage including sweeping away a family of five into the sea in Scotland as they tried to get away from their home. (Source: newspaper reports)
2005	London	Terrorism	52	700+	7 July: Three bombs detonated by suicide bombers on underground trains just outside Liverpool Street and Edgware Road stations, and on another travelling between Kings Cross and Russell Square. A fourth explosion happened on a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square. (Source: newspaper/media reports)
2005	London	Terrorism	–	–	21 July: Four more attempted bombings, similar to those of 7 July. All attempts failed giving police much forensic material. (Source: (BBC News website)
2005	Birmingham	Weather	0	19	28 July: A tornado lasting just four minutes hit Birmingham. Wind speeds of between 115 and 136 miles per hour were recorded. (Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/birmingham/content/articles/2005/07/28/tornado_feature.shtml)
2006	East Sussex	Fire/ Explosion	2	Several'	3 December: Explosion at Festival Fireworks, Ringmer. (Source: Crisis Response Vol 3 Issue 2 p14-15)
2007	Cumbria	Rail	1	Several'	23 February: Glasgow bound Virgin train derailed and slid down embankment. (Source: newspaper reports)
2007	United Kingdom	Weather	14	N/K	January: Worst storms since 1990 battered the UK resulting in death, severe disruption and damage. (Source: newspaper reports)
2007	United Kingdom	Weather	N/K	N/K	June/July: Flooding affected numerous counties causing widespread disruption. (Source: newspaper reports. Update when/if official report published)
2008	London	Air	–	–	17 January: Boeing 777 made emergency landing at Heathrow. 136 passengers safely evacuated, some with minor injuries. (Source: newspaper reports)
2008	United Kingdom	Fire	–	14	11 September. Fire in freight train carrying lorries from Britain to France. 26 rail trucks incinerated in temperatures reaching 1,800 degree Fahrenheit. (Source: newspaper reports)
2009	London	Fire/ evacuation	–	3	2 January: Fire at Royal Marsden cancer hospital in Chelsea, West London. Around 80 patients evacuated. (Source: newspaper reports)

7. There are currently significant variations in the levels of investment and capability in control services. Fire and rescue authorities are funded to maintain business continuity and in view of previous delays to FiReControl some fire and rescue authorities have continued to invest in their existing control rooms and have introduced new systems using the latest technology whilst others have chosen not to upgrade their control rooms and rely on less advanced technology.

8. There are also large variations in the running costs of control services. Under current arrangements all control rooms need sufficient staff to handle emergencies or unexpected spikes in call volume. In practice, this means that in many control rooms' staff regularly undertake routine fire and rescue authority administrative and auxiliary tasks during quieter periods. This results in significant differences in the comparative costs of call handling across England. Given that there is a limit to how much, even the quietest, control rooms can reduce their staffing costs, the average number of emergency calls taken by each control staff member varies significantly. In London the average is in excess of 1,800 per year and less than 200 per year in the quietest. As illustrated in the graph below there is a large cluster of fire and rescue authorities whose call volumes range between 500 and 700 calls per year, or broadly four to five per shift. This graph clearly demonstrates that larger control rooms have the potential to be more efficient.

Fire and rescue control room efficiency – current position



Rationale for intervention:

9. The economic rationale for government intervention in providing fire protection services can be found in market failure. Fire services have public good features, namely that it is non-rival – one person benefiting from the protection offered does not diminish another person's protection. Secondly, fire protection is 'non-excludable'. Because fire spreads it is not feasible or safe to exclude anyone who does not pay for fire protection without endangering those who have. For these reasons there would be under-provision of a public good were it not for the role of government. There is also an equity case that leaving the provision of fire protection to private means would have particular risks for disadvantaged groups, who tend to be subject to greater incidence of fire incidents. Finally, there may also be an overriding national security interest in providing sufficient infrastructure to deal with a disaster of national importance that the market would deem an uninsurable risk.

10. Having established that there is a role for government in provision of fire services, the rationale for the specific intervention referred to in this impact assessment is to ensure that the public sector provides fire control in a way that offers the best value for money.

11. There is also a strong policy rationale for undertaking a consultation. Following the cancellation of FiReControl the Government wishes to work with the fire and rescue services to help them to improve their capability and capacity to handle emergency calls efficiently and to make the control service infrastructure as resilient as possible within the resources available.

12. Ministers do not wish to impose a solution on fire and rescue authorities. They believe that the policy objectives for FiReControl – improved resilience, operational capacity (modernisation) and efficiency – are still important but wish to consult the fire and rescue community on whether these continue to be the right issues to shape decisions on the future of the emergency control services and how these should be delivered.

13. Also, DCLG has made a significant investment in procuring equipment and technology for FiReControl and entering into long-term lease agreements on nine bespoke highly resilient control centre buildings. The Department wishes to give fire and rescue services the opportunity to benefit from this investment and to achieve the best possible outcome for the taxpayer.

Policy objectives:

Resilience

14. The FiReControl project aimed to increase the resilience of the fire and rescue control service through:

    - improving the physical security of controls
    - improving the ability and efficiency to deal with large peaks in emergency (999) call volumes
    - improving the ability to mobilise resources on a national scale during a major crisis.

15. Resilience remains a key policy objective. However, this Government does not believe that that a national network of controls, as envisaged by FiRecontrol, is the only way to protect the public. It believes that recent advances in technology mean that there are now alternative approaches and that decisions on upgrading control services should be made by fire and rescue authorities whose Chief Fire Officers can advise them on operational issues including levels of risk.

Efficiency

16. Improving efficiency is another key policy objective. There are currently 46 separate fire and rescue authority control rooms in England which require significant on-going investment in technology and staffing. It is likely that following the cancellation of FiReControl and the financial pressures that all are now facing many fire and rescue authorities will be looking for ways to reduce the cost of their control provision through outsourcing or sharing control services.

Technological enhancement

17. The Government supports the technological enhancement of control services. However, developments in technology during the past five years mean that many of the state of the art features that FiReControl would have introduced, such as Automatic Vehicle Location Systems are widely available in the off-the-shelf systems, and have been adopted by an increasing number of fire and rescue authorities. Fire and rescue services can also now take advantage of work they have undertaken for the FiReControl project to develop common fire and rescue authority procedures and processes, data standards and interfaces. These developments provide opportunities for better collaboration between fire and rescue authorities and improve their ability to handle each others' calls. The delays in implementing FiReControl have led many fire and rescue authorities to invest in their existing control rooms and introduce new systems which use the latest technology. The previous disparity between control rooms is therefore diminishing and it is questionable what barriers remain to fire and rescue authorities embarking upon their own technology improvement programmes or merging their control rooms with other fire and rescue authorities who have already invested in new technology.

18. The consultation sets out four alternative scenarios each of which involves the allocation of central funding to improve fire and rescue authory control services.

Option 1 Do minimum approach. DCLG support Firelink radio upgrades but take no further role.

19. Under this scenario complete freedom is given to fire and rescue authorities to maintain their own control rooms or collaborate with other fire and rescue authorities as they decide is best to meet local needs and contribute to wider resilience. This model would involve no central intervention beyond funding and coordination of the infrastructure upgrades required to secure Firelink radio benefits such as data mobilising. The coordination role does not need necessarily to be carried out by central government as it could be carried out by the sector, for example the Chief Fire Officers Association or a lead authority.

20. Fire authorities would be advised by their Chief Fire Officers on the resilience offered by their current arrangements in the context of the requirements placed on them by the statutory framework and would wish to consider what further development might be necessary to protect the public.

21. It is assumed that it would be unlikely that there would be any interest from fire and rescue authorities in the nine control centre buildings and that these would be disposed of by central government at the best available price.

22. *Assumptions*

- DCLG holds the leases on the nine control centre buildings and the full rental costs would need to be met by DCLG until such times as they could be disposed of
- the absence of additional funding for fire and rescue authorities (beyond the installation of Firelink) would result in a slower rate of control service improvement.

23. *Risks*

- Without any additional financial support improvements in resilience will take longer to achieve and there is a significant risk that smaller fire and rescue authorities will continue to be overwhelmed during incidents which prompt a high volume of calls. This may result in responses to calls being delayed or even calls missed altogether
- Fire and rescue authorities will find it difficult to make the investment necessary to achieve efficiency savings
- Any mitigations of these risks would need to determined at a local level.

24. *Costs*

- refer to Policy Option summary.

25. *Benefits*

- there would be some technical enhancement of fire and rescue authority equipment
- there would be low delivery risks
- this is the lowest cost option for DCLG.

26. *Indirect effects*

- this option would reinvigorate IT competition which has been damaged by the prospect of FiReControl as a variety of suppliers would be able to bid to upgrade and maintain local systems.

Option 2 Common standards of resilience agreed nationally

27. This option proposes that the fire and rescue sector establishes national performance standards for fire and rescue authority control resilience. These standards could relate to:

- improving the physical security of controls
- improving the ability and efficiency to deal with large peaks in emergency (999) call volumes
- the ability to mobilise resources on a national scale during a major crisis.

It is anticipated that the standards would be developed and monitored by the sector (eg Chief Fire Officers Association). The method for achieving compliance would lie with individual fire and rescue authorities.

28. It is probable that some fire and rescue authorities would choose to share their control services with other fire and rescue authorities or outsource their controls to comply with the new standards, whilst others may decide retaining a dedicated standalone control with improved interoperability arrangements would be sufficient. For some that have modern IT infrastructure and adequate back-up arrangements, very little change may be required to comply with the standards.

29. The Department for Communities and Local Government would support the development of the resilience standards financially with the technical and operational elements being led by the sector. This option could be combined with other options to increase the overall level of resilience.

30. Where control centres are not taken up by the fire and rescue authorities DCLG would seek to offset their cost with contributions from other parties or dispose of them.

31. *Assumptions*

- the creation of a set of standards developed by the sector should lead to increased resilience
- the impact upon efficiency and technological enhancement will be dependent upon what structural changes are made by fire and rescue authorities as a result of the standards and whether the standards are combined with one of the other options.

32. *Risks*

- In view of the current differences between control rooms and fire and rescue authorities' varying priorities, it will be challenging for fire and rescue authorities to achieve a consensus on what these standards should include – this would be a matter for local determination and the Local Government Association and Chief Fire Officers Association may wish to take a lead
- There is a risk that if the standards set were too ambitious, or implemented too quickly, they could create a demand for funding which could not be met in the current financial climate – the sector would need to ensure that the standards were achievable and affordable.

33. *Costs*

- refer to Policy Option summary.

34. *Benefits*

- increased resilience compared to current position
- low delivery risk
- provides a national standard of resilience
- can be used in conjunction with another option to increase resilience incrementally.

35. *Indirect effects*

- this option would reinvigorate IT competition which has been damaged by the prospect of FiReControl as a variety of suppliers would be able to bid to upgrade and maintain local systems.

Option 3 – Provide central resources to incentivise improvements in resilience and efficiency

36. Under this option financial incentives would be put in place designed to encourage greater collaboration between fire and rescue authorities through sharing of existing control rooms and making use of the control centre buildings. In terms of collaboration one fire and rescue authority may choose to provide the service (an outsourced approach) for one or more fire and rescue authorities, or a collection of fire and rescue authorities could collaborate to run a merged control hub (a consortium approach). The funding of financial incentives to support local change (i.e. the local changes fund) would come from two sources:

    - Economies achieved by reducing the cost of Firelink installation (Firelink currently needs to be installed in every control room. If fire and rescue authorities choose to share control services this will reduce the number of control rooms needed and as a consequence reduce the significant costs of Firelink installation (met by DCLG). The reduction in DCLG costs has the potential to free up money which could be invested elsewhere, for example allocations to support the transitional costs of fire and rescue authorities that wish to consolidate or outsource their controls
    - The re-allocation of any money made available as a result of contribution to rent from fire and rescue authorities who move their existing controls into shared controls housed in one of the control centre buildings. This money could be re-allocated to fire and rescue authorities to support efficiencies and the technological enhancement of control services
    - Where control centres are not taken up by the fire and rescue authorities DCLG would seek to offset their cost with contributions from other parties or dispose of them.

37. *Assumptions*

    - Providing financial incentives will encourage fire and rescue authorities to innovate and to work together collaboratively to improve resilience and achieve efficiency gains – it is not possible to know in advance how many or which fire and rescue authorities would wish to change their current arrangements as a result of these incentives
    - DCLG proposes to give the fire and rescue authorities first refusal on the control centre buildings and will start to engage in exploratory discussions with them during the consultation period to speed up the decision making process. Any buildings not required by fire and rescue authorities will be disposed of to a third party under the terms of the lease.

38. *Risks*

- Collaboration has the potential for increasing risk as any failure affecting the shared control room will affect a greater geographical area – to mitigate this risk fire and rescue authorities would need to improve their buddying arrangements and ensure that adequate back-up and fallback arrangements are in place.

39. *Costs*

- refer to Policy Option summary.

40. *Benefits*

- fire and rescue authorities occupying control centre buildings would benefit from increased physical resilience compared to the current position
- collaboration may increase resilience by ensuring control rooms are able to operate across a wider geographical area and mobilise effectively the resources of more than one fire and rescue service (but see counter-risk above)
- increased staffing efficiencies compared to options 1 and 2
- enhanced resilience compared to current position
- would deliver functional benefits compared to current position
- makes good use of FiReControl legacy assets.

41. *Indirect effects*

- promotes IT competition as a variety of suppliers likely to bid to upgrade and maintain local systems.

Option 4 – Re-procure a new national IT system for fire and rescue authority control services

42. Under this option a common, England-wide system for control rooms is created operating from the same IT solution and ways of working. It is likely, though not certain, that the network would operate from some of the bespoke control centres procured as part of the FiReControl project. There would be no obligation from DCLG for fire and rescue authorities to join the network and unless there was a very strong demand from the sector for DCLG to take the lead it would be expected that another organisation such as Chief Fire Officers Association or a lead authority would do so.

43. Central government would part-fund the new system with any balance being met by fire and rescue authorities. There would be no further investment in the installation of Firelink into existing fire and rescue authority control rooms. Fire and rescue authorities would continue to be responsible for maintaining their current control rooms.

44. Where control centres are not taken up by the fire and rescue authorities DCLG would seek to offset their cost with contributions from other parties or dispose of them.

45. *Assumptions*

- this option would be led by the sector
- there would be no compulsion from DCLG for fire and rescue authorities to join the network
- this would require a lengthy procurement process
- the costs would be shared by fire and rescue authorities and DCLG
- all decisions including the type of IT system and use of accommodation would be for fire and rescue authority determination.

46. *Risks*

- this may not be affordable in the current financial climate
- there is a considerable risk that any attempt to repeat a large-scale IT procurement and development exercise could result in cost overruns and delays.

47. *Costs*

- refer to Policy Option summary.

48. *Benefits*

- this option potentially offers highest level of resilience
- this option would provide all fire and rescue authorities with consistent levels of technology
- potential for enhanced efficiency (but this would be dependent on system procured and other costs)
- this option would make good use of FiReControl legacy assets although not all buildings would be likely to be used.

Indirect effects

- awarding a single contract for the development and maintenance of a national system would limit competition amongst the IT supply market for control and mobilisation systems.

Wider impact:

49. This consultation puts responsibility for decisions on upgrading fire and rescue control services back in the hands of fire and rescue authorities in line with localism. Under all of these options decisions on procurement would rest with fire and rescue authorities rather than central government. The award of a single, nationwide contract to Cassidian for FiReControl effectively stifled competition in the provision of control service IT systems. Under each of the options proposed in this consultation, procurement decisions would rest with fire and rescue authorities or representative organisations and all of the options apart from the re-procurement of a national network would allow for a more competitive procurement process.

Summary and preferred option:

50. DCLG's preferred option is Option C. This would support key policy objectives by encouraging fire and rescue authorities to work together to improve resilience and achieve efficiency savings thus releasing additional funding for the technological enhancement of control services. This option also has the potential to make best use of the FiReControl legacy assets and thereby achieve value for the taxpayer.

51. However, the Government does not intend to impose its preferred solution on fire and rescue authorities. A decision on the way forward will not be taken by ministers until the consultation has concluded and the views of the fire and rescue services can be taken into account.

Annexes

Annex 1: Post Implementation Review Plan

A Post Implementation Review Plan should be undertaken, usually three to five years after implementation of the policy, but exceptionally a longer period may be more appropriate. The Plan should examine the extent to which the implemented regulations have achieved their objectives, assess their costs and benefits and identify whether they are having any unintended consequences. Please set out the Plan as detailed below. If there is no intention to do a Post Implementation Review Plan please provide reasons below.

Reasons for not planning a Post Implementation Review Plan: This impact assessment relates to a consultation exercise on the way forward following the cancellation of the FiReControl project. The Government does not intend to impose its preferred solution on fire and rescue authorities. A decision on the way forward will not be taken by ministers until the consultation has concluded and the views of the fire and rescue services can be taken into account.

As each of the options under consideration are different, it would be premature to pre-empt any outcome of the consultation by planning any Post Implementation Review at the moment. However once the consultation has been completed and the way forward is known we shall develop a plan as part of a revised impact assessment.

Annex E

Consultation questions

Section 3 – Lessons from FiReControl

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?

Section 4 – Defining the policy objectives

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?

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

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?

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 of control services – and, if so, what should this be?

Section 5 – Central government support

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.

Section 6 – Funding choices

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?

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.

About this consultation

This consultation document and consultation process have been planned to adhere to the Code of Practice on Consultation issued by the Department for Business Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and is in line with the seven consultation criteria, which are:

- formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome
- consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible
- consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals
- consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach
- keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained
- consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation
- officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

Representative groups are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent, and, where relevant, who else they have consulted in reaching their conclusions when they respond.

Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department.

The Department for Communities and Local Government will process your personal data in accordance with DPA and in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties. Individual responses will not be acknowledged unless specifically requested.

Your opinions are valuable to us. Thank you for taking the time to read this document and respond.

Are you satisfied that this consultation has followed these criteria? If not, or you have any other observations about how we can improve the process, please contact:

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