Communities
and Local Government

Future of fire and rescue control services in England – consultation
Summary of responses

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Contents

Section 1

Summary

The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) consulted on the future of fire and rescue control services in England from 13 January to 8 April 2011. At the start of the consultation, Fire Minister Bob Neill MP made it clear that no solution would be imposed on Fire and Rescue Authorities.

As part of the consultation, officials attended a number of meetings with Fire and Rescue Authorities and senior officers in Fire and Rescue Services to discuss the issues raised in the consultation and their future plans following the termination of the FiReControl project. In total, 61 submissions were received from the public consultation exercise, mainly from fire and rescue authorities and services (41), organisations representing their interests (4), geographical fire and rescue partnerships (3) and suppliers in the fire and rescue industry (8).

A broad consensus emerged, from both the responses and discussions held, on a number of points although views diverged on how some continuing and future objectives should be achieved. These points were:

- The Government's approach of not imposing a solution and leaving the fire and rescue community to decide the best way forward for their service and their communities was widely welcomed.

- Improved resilience, enhanced technology and increased efficiency were considered at least as important now as when the FiReControl project started (by 54 of 55 responses expressing a view). Many felt efficiency was even more important with the current budgetary pressures.

- The great majority (40 of the 42 responses expressing a view) agreed with the summary of lessons learnt from the FiReControl project published in the consultation document. Many of those commenting highlighted early approaches – both decisions made and governance structures set up (24 responses in total) – as core to the project's eventual closure. The perceived lack of involvement of the fire and rescue community in the initial stages and a belief that their input was ignored were widely cited (in 33 responses). Some observed that these issues improved in the later stages. Criticisms of the control centre buildings were also made (in 18 responses).

- The positive legacy most commonly identified was the increased level of collaboration and dialogue between Fire and Rescue Services. Those responding believed this had led to improved understanding, cross-border operations and

shared practices. The Ways of Working strand of the FiReControl project was seen as providing a basis for future work on common procedural standards (15 of those responding were positive about this).

- The approach described in the consultation document of increased collaboration – determined locally – with some Government support was most popular (with 42 of the 50 expressing a view – 84 per cent) as the way ahead.

- Nearly two-thirds of those selecting this collaborative approach wanted to see it combined with national technical standards, operating protocols and procedures. The majority believed these should be sector led and government supported although some suggested that government would need to play a stronger role to ensure adoption. Common standards were also advocated in relation to other aspects of the consultation, eg for interoperability so more resilient fallback and overload arrangements could be established.

- Future plans, and the stage they had reached, varied widely among Fire and Rescue Authorities.

- Most Fire and Rescue Authorities and Services, including their representative organisations and groups (35 out of 43 expressing a view – three did not express a view and two rated all options equally) saw the completion of the Firelink network to deliver enhanced voice services and a data operating environment as the top priority for funding. The favoured technical option for Firelink (by 29 of the 35 expressing a view) was to implement a fully networked voice and data service in existing control rooms.

- Fire and Rescue Authorities emphasised that they needed rapid clarity from the Government on funding available, and how it would be allocated, so they could progress with their plans.

The responses contained a wide variety of views on other aspects of the consultation – sometimes contradictory views on a particular issue were expressed in different responses.

Legacy assets

At the same time as the consultation took place, discussions on the future use of the control centres have resulted in the lease on the London building being assigned to the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority following agreement on a suitable arrangement over costs. The Government's preference is for the buildings to be used by Fire and Rescue Services, as originally intended, but where agreement cannot be reached, the Department will seek other suitable tenants for them. At present discussions continue with Fire and Rescue Authorities, some working in collaboration, on a number of the other buildings.

The Chief Fire Officers' Association has kindly agreed to host on its website some of the legacy data assets from the FiReControl project. These include outputs from the harmonised Ways of Working strand. National datasets have been divided by Fire and Rescue Service area and circulated to the appropriate service.

Next steps – funding for improvements

Following the Fire Minister's consideration of the responses, the Department intends to take forward a strategy of supporting enhancements to fire and rescue control and mobilisation arrangements in a way that delivers improvements to resilience, security and efficiency. This will build national resilience through enhanced local rather than national solutions. The Department will provide funding to support these improvements in a fair and transparent process developed with the fire and rescue sector.

The Department will make available total funding of up to £81 million. As a guideline, this will provide up to £1.8 million for each Fire and Rescue Authority in England. Authorities may submit plans for more than £1.8 million if exceptional resilience benefits would result. All Authorities will be invited to send a summary of their plans and these will be reviewed by the Department to ensure that the funding they are providing offers value for taxpayers' money and resilience benefits.

An additional £1.8m (in total) will be available to fund initiatives from the sector that deliver cross-cutting resilience and efficiency benefits. This might include work on developing common technical and procedural standards, for example.

Guidance on the scheme is being circulated to Fire and Rescue Authorities and Services at the same time as publication of this document. The Department is asking for returns by 4 November 2011 but earlier returns can be made for resilience reasons. The Department will not be monitoring individual local projects but will need to oversee delivery with the Fire and Rescue Services and assure resilience outcomes.

The Department and the sector intend to organise a review conference in early 2012 to share experiences and best practice, and identify improvements to national resilience. This might highlight difficulties and how they were overcome – and possibly identify barriers that the Department could help remove.

The Chief Fire Officers' Association and Local Government Association have agreed, in principle, to work with the Department in taking forward the proposals and be part of the oversight process.

Next steps – revised National Framework

Securing national resilience and ensuring public safety against identified national risks is the primary focus of central Government in its ongoing relationship with the Fire and Rescue Services. As announced in the Government response to the sector's *Fire Futures Reports*[1], the recently published *Fire Futures Reports – Government response*[2], the Department will work with the sector to develop and consult on a new National Framework. This will define national and local resilience roles, including issues arising in the context of cross-border working interoperability, and multi-agency interoperability. Discussions will include considering a national communications capability and standards for data exchange.

Summary of next steps

The next steps that the Department intends to take are summarised in the table below.

Date	Activity
July–November 2011	The Department invites Fire and Rescue Authorities to send a summary of plans and request funding to support resilience and efficiency improvements
July–November 2011	Fire and Rescue Services, Authorities and representative organisations send summaries of any initiatives requiring funding that support national improvements in resilience and efficiency, eg work on common technical and procedural standards
4 November 2011	Final date for receipt of plans
Late 2011	The Department consults on a revised *Fire and Rescue Service National Framework*, following development work with the sector to define local and national resilience roles
By 31 January 2012	Confirmation of grant funding
Early 2012	Department/Local Government Group/Chief Fire Officers' Association review conference to share experience and best practice, and identify national resilience improvements emerging from local solutions
Ongoing	Separate discussions on use of control centre buildings

[1] See *Fire Futures Reports*. A series of options from the sector for the future of fire and rescue provision in England, December 2010, http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/firefuturesforward

[2] See *Fire Futures Reports – Government response.* Department for Communities and Local Government, April 2011, http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/firefuturesresponse

Section 2

Background

On 20 December 2010, Fire Minister Bob Neill MP announced the termination of the main IT contract and closure of the FiReControl project. The project began in 2004, following a short consultation, and had aimed to replace England's 46 standalone fire and rescue control rooms with a national network of nine resilient control centres. The contract was terminated because the contractor EADS Defence and Security (now trading as Cassidian) Ltd could not meet the requirements of the project within an acceptable timeframe.

The project was set up largely in response to the unprecedented scale of threat facing the country – both from terrorism (9/11) and from natural disasters such as widespread flooding that were predicted to increase as a result of climate change. It was the third part of the Department's £1bn investment programme in the Fire and Rescue Services alongside New Dimension and Firelink that were already delivering modern equipment, communications and training.

Fire and Rescue Authorities have a statutory duty to respond to emergency fire and rescue calls and mobilise appropriate resources to incidents under the *Fire and Rescue Services Act* 2004. Throughout the project Fire and Rescue Authorities continued to be funded via traditional funding streams to maintain and replace their control room systems in order to fulfil their statutory duty. The FiReControl project was included in the *Fire and Rescue Service National Framework 2008–11*.

The consultation was conducted according to the Code of Practice on Consultation and was open for 12 weeks running from 13 January 2011 to 8 April 2011.

In order to understand the implications for the fire and rescue sector of closing the FiReControl project, responses to the following questions were sought:

1. **Do you agree with the assessment of FiReControl set out in Section 3 [*Lessons from FiReControl*]? What lessons do you think we can learn from FiReControl – both positive and negative?**

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

3. **Which aspects of resilience described in Section 4 [*Defining the policy objectives*] are most important for control services? Are there other aspects which are not mentioned here?**

4. **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?**

5. **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?**

6. **Which of the approaches (or combination of approaches) for the delivery of control services set out in Section 5 [*Central government support*] would provide the best outcome for the fire and rescue community and the public? Please give reasons for your choice.**

7. **Do you agree that the right funding priorities are set out in Section 6 [*Funding choices*] and do you have any comments on the order in which these are presented?**

8. **Which of the technical options for Firelink [see also Annex C – *Summary of technical options for further use of Firelink*] would best meet fire and rescue service needs? Please give reasons for your choice.**

This document summarises the responses to the consultation and the Department for Communities and Local Government's response to these.

The consultation document can be found at:
www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/fireandrescuecontrolservices

Section 3

Outcome of consultation

In total, 61 written responses were received from Fire and Rescue Services, Fire and Rescue Authorities, geographical partnerships of Fire and Rescue Services, representative organisations in the fire and rescue sector, suppliers in the fire and rescue industry, and individuals.

Type of organisation	No. of responses
Fire and Rescue Authority/ Fire and Rescue Service	41
Geographical fire and rescue partnership	3
Representative fire and rescue organisation	4
Supplier from the fire and rescue industry	8
Individuals	5
Total	**61**

A full list of organisations that responded is shown in Annex A. While the majority of responses were from individual Fire and Rescue Authorities and Services, the main representative organisations also responded – the Local Government Group, the Chief Fire Officers' Association, the Fire Brigades Union and the Fire Officers' Association. Three responses came from partnerships of Fire and Rescue Services in different parts of the country – the south east, north west and Thames Valley.

One respondent requested confidentiality of their response, two requested confidentiality of their business cases sent as part of their response and a further one requested that only extracts from their response be published.

A summary of the responses is outlined below, collated under five core themes:

- Lessons from the FiReControl project

- Resilience, technology and efficiency

- Collaboration, common standards and future fire and rescue service plans

- Priorities for available funding

- The future role for central government

- The options for Firelink.

Selected quotations to illustrate the flavour of the responses are provided throughout the text and in Annex B.

Theme 1: Lessons from the FiReControl project

The great majority (29 of the 31 who expressed a view) of the responses agreed broadly with the assessment in the consultation document – four also specifically endorsed the views expressed by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee in their Report of April 2010[3]. Overarching criticisms focused on the project's early stages and decisions taken then (24 responses identified these) – its ambition and complexity as well as its imposition by government, governance and lack of the sector's involvement (33 responses on the last point). Several commented that the project's scale was disproportionate to the level of risk faced, especially when compared to solutions proposed for the other emergency services at the time – a better balance between resilience, affordability and risk had been needed.

> *"Despite efforts in recent years to improve communication and engagement, these early problems and decisions continued to damage the long term viability of this project"* **Chief Fire Officers' Association**
>
> *"While all Fire and Rescue Authorities agree that there is a need to increase resilience in the control system, we have consistently argued that a centrally-dictated, one size fits all model was not the appropriate way of achieving this."* **Local Government Group**
>
> *"There appeared to be a lack of practical user input in developing the specification and an unrealistic level of complexity resulted from a lack of Fire and Rescue Service involvement at an early enough stage."* **Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"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"* **Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"such standards were only being applied to fire service control rooms when the threat level to other emergency service control rooms would have been at least as high … This leaves the perception that the response within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, as it was at the time, was not proportionate to the threats that were being faced and that the response was not joined up across government."* **London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority**

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[3] Communities and Local Government Select Committee *FiReControl* Fifth Report HC 352 April 2010
    http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmcomloc.htm

Poor project and risk management was raised in 12 responses. A total of 14 responses pointed out that the project's expected benefits of savings and technical enhancements eroded over time and the system could now be delivered in alternative ways. The delays and the uncertainty the delays caused for the fire and rescue services – and especially control room staff – were a particular issue for some and they felt the 'people factor' had been under-represented in the consultation document.

> *"The impact that uncertainty around the project has had on staff directly affected should not be underestimated. People working in control rooms, particularly, have been through years of uncertainty regarding their future."* **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Our principal concern was the welfare of control room staff and making the most of the opportunity, afforded by an extremely lengthy lead-in period, to re-train and redeploy staff prior to changeover. Sadly, the majority of Fire and Rescue Services failed to seize this opportunity and many people were left in a state of uncertainty for a long period of time"* **Fire Officers' Association**

Another point made strongly in seven responses was there was too little recognition that FiReControl was not just an IT project but about business change to modernise England's Fire and Rescue Services. Views were mixed on whether the public sector should deliver large-scale IT projects.

> *"There was an over reliance on, and confidence in, the technological solution, with less focus on the process changes required across a very mature service sector. The sector-wide business process re-engineering that FiReControl needed to succeed was not happening on the ground"* **Merseyside Fire and Rescue Authority**
>
> *"It may in principle be possible for central government to deliver large-scale IT projects in future, but for this to happen the appropriate project governance arrangements should first be established and all relevant partners be involved at the outset. Therefore, we do not agree with the principle that all large-scale IT projects should now be avoided by the public sector … we would, however, urge greater caution to be exercised in future where such projects are concerned."* **Suffolk County Council**
>
> *"Technology has developed and continues to do so at such a pace that it is counterproductive to efficiency and effectiveness to embark upon large-scale, national IT projects that have lead-in times of several years."* **Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority**

The national, regional and local dimensions

Seven responses expressed the view that the national 'one size fits all' was not the right model for achieving resilience, nor indeed for the fire and rescue services. A few (four) suggested, for example, that it was overly ambitious to expect the project to produce standardised ways of working from 46 different operating procedures and to satisfy the needs of 46 autonomous users – it may have been a missed opportunity for reducing this diversity and for harmonisation. However, the progress made through the 'Ways of Working' strand of the project was widely praised – specifically mentioned in 15 responses (see below *Positive outcomes from the FiReControl project*).

> *"The desire to allow each Fire and Rescue Service to maintain their existing mobilising arrangements and procedures made the project virtually unmanageable. The project needed to set out the parameters from the start, that this would be a national system with national operating and mobilising procedures, which would be adopted by all."*
> **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"The FiReControl project raised awareness of some very basic differences between English fire services, which fundamentally, do the same job. This made inter-service working difficult and often controversial. The project highlighted the fundamental need for consistency between fire services."* **Motorola**

A few suggested a tension between local integrated risk management plans (IRMP) and the national approach of FiReControl. However others still advocated the national approach, similar to FiReControl, but remedying all the lessons learnt.

The regional approach had critics and supporters. The imposed boundaries divided established partners in places and some suggested the lead authority approach would have worked better than local authority controlled companies. Some pointed out that metropolitans, county and combined fire authorities should be grouped together and not mixed – the project had failed to recognise how much they have in common compared to simply grouping geographical neighbours. However others said regional teams worked well and that, following the project closure, they had decided to retain some regional aspects. These highlighted improved collaboration, knowledge and consistency with neighbours as positive outcomes resulting directly from FiReControl.

"There was a tension throughout between the localism of local integrated risk management plans and national prescription FiReControl." **Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service**

"The regional approach was an impediment in some areas but not all." **Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service**

"The East Midlands as a region developed and adopted a cohesive governance model that proactively supported the underlying principles of FiReControl. This model has undoubtedly improved communication within the region and has led to the achievement of a range of improvements." **Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority**

"There were misgivings about the practicality of the Governance arrangements established for the management of the Regional Control Centres through a Local Authority Controlled Company. The structure was complicated by the use of Fire Authority Members from constituent authorities that could, in effect, be holding themselves to account." **Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service**

Engagement with the fire and rescue services

The lack of involvement and influence of the fire and rescue community – both operational staff and elected members – particularly at the beginning, was a key point made by many (33 responses criticised lack of involvement). They felt this led to a lack of 'buy in' and support as well as a missed opportunity in using fire and rescue expertise and experience to understand and specify user requirements at the outset. A few highlighted a lack of understanding of the role of control rooms at the heart of the fire and rescue service operation as well as the wider fire and rescue command and control process. A view then persisted throughout the project that the system might not meet user needs.

There were some areas where improved working relationships were highlighted – including the test and assurance team that participated in the solution establishment workshops.

> *"Partnership …was never achieved, possibly due to the lack of departmental experience in managing projects of this nature and staffing issues within the department which was reflected by the reliance on a high level of secondees being released by Fire Authorities to support the project."* **Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"From the outset of FiReControl it was clear that there was a lack of understanding outside the Fire and Rescue Service community of how current control rooms operate and how they integrate within their Fire and Rescue Service."* **Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Control rooms are at the heart of most Fire and Rescue Services, both physically and metaphorically. They provide the essential link between our communities and our resources, both operational response and prevention services."* **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Early engagement would have benefited the project and maybe set out a more deliverable set of expectations and assisted in achieving 'buy in' from Fire and Rescue Services."* **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"It is reassuring that the present Government acknowledges the importance of building strong, supportive relationships with the fire and rescue community. The project was often managed in a way which ignored the advice from the Fire and Rescue Services. This led to frustration, suspicion and anger from the Fire and Rescue Services which was counterproductive to successful implementation of the project."* **County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"In addition, the early creation of a test team of secondees from Fire and Rescue Services, civil servants and professional testers, way before any solution was introduced, was a positive step"* **Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service**

The poor relationship between the three main partners – the Department, fire and rescue community, and the main contractor EADS Defence & Security – was cited as an issue in 11 responses.

Three responses commented on the waste of fire and rescue service resources as well as public money during the course of the project.

Management of the project

A total of twelve responses put forward the view that the project and risk management by the national team was poor. Five mentioned a lack of openness and transparency throughout. Several pointed out the difficulties caused by a lack of project plans and timetables, lack of clarity on funding issues and other shortfalls in governance and communications. Some expressed the view that these improved during the project, as did stakeholder management and engagement with the sector.

> *"At the heart of this is the most important lesson to be learnt and it is associated with project management skills, governance models and the requirement to establish and maintain good communication at all levels."* **Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority**
>
> *"Greater openness and transparency would have been achieved if the Fire and Rescue Service had been given a more significant role in the management and decision making processes for the project."* **County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Poor risk management from the side of the Fire and Rescue Service as many of the project teams were made up of uniformed officers with extensive operational experience, but minimal risk management knowledge"* **Individual**

Five responses expressed the view that too many consultants were used – both directly within the national project team and to review and report on the project – with an over-reliance on advice from these consultants instead of advice from the fire and rescue community.

The technical system proposed

There was a variety of comments on the technical solution. The main themes were:

- The solution was overspecified/ underspecified, suffered 'scope creep' from the original objectives and would not meet user needs

- The lack of experience of the main contractor – EADS Defence & Security – and the Department in delivery for the fire and rescue sector

- The untried integration and networking of the technology

- The commercial 'off the shelf' products requiring too much bespoke development

- The technology became out of date before it was delivered due to the delays and unrealistic initial timescales

- The perception that too many changes were made through change control notes (although, in fact, there were relatively few)

- Delays in delivery by EADS.

"We contend that the suppliers did not research fully how the Fire and Rescue Service currently operates and how those systems/ processes could be used in future to improve efficiency." **Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Service**

"It is a matter of fact that one of the main contributory factors to the failure of the FiReControl project was the inability of the main contractor to deliver on time, on specification and on cost. It is however also our view that many of the difficulties experienced throughout the project could have been mitigated by regular and meaningful consultation with Fire and Rescue Services in the early stages of the project." **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

"As seen during this project, and others reliant on an IT solution, much of the technological development (software) was undertaken as the project progressed leading to major delays and setbacks when expected outcomes were found to be unachievable." **Fire Officers' Association**

"The original concept for Firecontrol included use of commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) components to reduce the costs of bespoke items. Clearly this has failed to produce the expected outcome and there should be an acceptance that the cost of providing future solutions may be high due to the need to use bespoke systems." **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

"Due to the continuing delays associated with the project much of the technology became obsolete during the life of the project." **Fire Brigades Union**

A few commented on the adverse effects on progress in the sector of having a single main supplier and welcomed the localist approach going forward as encouraging greater innovation through competition among a diversity of suppliers.

"It is worth noting that there is benefit from encouraging a diversity of technical systems in that suppliers will always be encouraged to continue exploring new technologies in order to stay one step ahead." **Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Authority**

The control centre buildings

Many of those responding (18 in total) commented on the control centre buildings. Views expressed included:

- They were delivered before there was a final business case or any visibility of the main IT system – they should have been commissioned when there was more certainty on the software

- The buildings were overspecified and expensive – for example, why did they need to be self-sufficient with the network providing back-up

- The involvement by local control room staff in the design of some elements was appreciated

- They were delivered on time.

> *"With regard to the control centre buildings, the construction of these appeared to run very well, with the buildings being completed close to schedule dates. It was disappointing that the technology provision fell far behind the buildings, an issue that has led to the current position."* **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Whilst the overarching concept of the project was broadly supported, the buildings appear to have been significantly over specified and are clearly too large. The security arrangements incorporated into the premises appear also to be in excess of the actual requirements."* **North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service**

Positive outcomes from FiReControl

The positive legacy most widely mentioned was the greater collaboration and dialogue between Fire and Rescue Services. This has led, according to some responses, to greater interoperability, improved cross-border operations and a dialogue on sharing practices. The 'Ways of Working' strand of the project, developed jointly by the Fire and Rescue Services and the Department, was a valued part of the project according to 15 responses. Based on this workstream, the continuing work on standardised operating procedures and protocols currently being taken forward by the South East Operations Policy and Procedures Group (SEOPAP) was seen as vital by many for the next steps in collaboration and greater interoperability.

Other positive outcomes mentioned included:

- Information and data collection, including the partnership working with other parts of local authorities this led to – for example, the work on the National Land and Property Gazetteer

- The equipment supplied – for example, mobilising equipment in local fire stations, mobile data terminals in fire appliances

- Use of sector experts later in the project – for example, in the solution establishment workshops (SEWs).

"Despite the ultimate failure of the project, much good work was carried out under FiReControl and this must not be lost as it will have value in taking forward new solutions." **Oxfordshire County Council**

"One benefit of the Firecontrol project that should continue to be supported by Government is the increased collaboration between Fire and Rescue Services. This is mostly intra-regional due to the nature of the project, but the need for resilience may introduce a wider nationwide approach leading to a fuller interoperable emergency fire and rescue service." **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

"The project did facilitate some excellent collaborative working within the south east, particularly with regards to resilience and interoperability." **Kent Fire and Rescue Service**

"The development of the core principles associated with data driven ways of working will be of greatest value to the Authority going forward" **Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority**

"The project has compelled Fire and Rescue Services to be more outward looking in identifying best practice and driving change within." **Humberside Fire and Rescue Service**

"This Authority has been fortunate to receive a number of assets as part of the FiReControl Project and been able to improve a number of areas of service provision. These include new station end equipment, mobile data terminals and officer mobilising technology. All of these will undoubtedly prove to be an integral part of any wide scale improvement plan." **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

"FiReControl leaves a valuable legacy to the Fire and Rescue Services. The work performed for the project has already delivered benefits to Fire and Rescue Services and care was taken as the project closed to ensure that key data assets, and the opportunity to take on the responsibility for maintenance and use of these, were passed to Fire and Rescue Services in order to extract further value. The collaboration between Fire and Rescue Services and their colleagues in local authorities which FiReControl established, remains in place and is impressive to observe." **GeoPlace**

Theme 2: Resilience, technology and efficiency

Most responses agreed (54 out of the 58 that commented) that the original objectives of improved resilience, technology and efficiency were at least as important today as they had been at the start of the FiReControl project in 2004. Events since then, such as widespread flooding incidents, had illustrated this and shown up some weaknesses in the current systems.[4] The need for efficiency had become greater with the current economic situation. The basic principles of the FiReControl project were widely supported – the issue was more the disproportionate response to the threats and the approach taken. A commonly made point was that enhanced technology supported both increased efficiency and improved resilience.

"The Chief Fire Officers' Association supported the principles behind FiReControl from the outset as this project was to provide a modern, resilient and centrally funded solution for all fire and rescue services". **Chief Fire Officers' Association**

"The principles upon which the FiReControl project was founded remain as valid today as they were at the inception of the FiReControl project." **Thames Valley Partnership**

"Technology is and should be used to support and aid Fire and Rescue Services in delivering the control room service, but only if it can perform to the appropriate level of availability and reliability. The FiReControl project has shown how hard this is to achieve especially when individual Fire and Rescue Services start from such diverse positions." **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

Several fire and rescue authorities pointed out that they continue to meet their statutory duty in maintaining a resilient and efficient control room.[5] However there was a fear that the technological gap between the most advanced and least – that would have narrowed under FiReControl – could now widen further.

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4   *Facing the Challenge – the Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser's review of the operational response by the Fire and Rescue Service to the widespread flooding in England during 2007*, March 2008, Department for Communities and Local Government www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/floodingreview

5   *Fire and Rescue Services Act* 2004, section 7(2)(c)

"Most Fire and Rescue Authorities now have the technology that FiReControl aspired to; however without central leadership there is a danger that the differentials that were apparent prior to FiReControl could well reappear." **Kent Fire and Rescue Service**

"We would also include the use of mobile data and AVLS [automatic vehicle location system] as being highly important to a resilient system; currently a large number of Fire and Rescue Services have no real ability to identify the dynamic location of their operational assets or provide them with effective data to support their role." **Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service**

"There have been few major failures of a fire service control room. Every service has always had its own effective, tried and tested business continuity arrangements to ensure that they can continue to carry out their statutory duty." **London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority**

"Call handling and mobilising of resources is the key issue. This remains a statutory duty for Fire and Rescue Services and therefore is not necessarily served best by a centralised function; it is one which Fire and Rescue Services have always discharged well and will continue to do so in the future." **Humberside Fire and Rescue Service**

Number of control rooms

Views were very mixed about the number of control rooms needed and the relationship of this with resilience and efficiency. Points made included:

- With falling numbers of calls and incidents there should be fewer control rooms on efficiency grounds

- Fewer control rooms could lead to less resilience (as a greater risk of single point of failure) and combined control rooms are potentially a greater target for physical and cyber attack

- Larger, shared control rooms give higher resilience and efficiency – for example, through more staff being available and advanced technology more affordable

- Separate but integrated systems are more resilient than one shared system.

"Resilience and efficiency are probably more important than they were when Firecontrol was initiated. The range, number and type of incidents is changing over time – climate change has resulted in large scale flooding in areas of the country not previously affected. The number of incidents attended is reducing as Fire and Rescue Service community initiatives come to fruition and attendances to fire alarm calls are managed" **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

"Most fire controls are not as resilient as they should be – they rely on small numbers of personnel and are frequently being maintained by minimum numbers of crewing." **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service**

"We do not agree that merging controls delivers the best outcomes in terms of resilience or efficiency for the Fire and Rescue Service or the public." **Fire Brigades Union**

"the number of combined control rooms looks likely to increase and as such, they will become more legitimate targets for physical and cyber attack aimed at compromising emergency response." **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

"There is an acceptance that 46 independent control rooms may not deliver the most financially efficient service to the public. It is now the right time to explore alternative methods of delivery including merger and outsourcing" **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

"We recognise that the maintenance of independent sustainable solutions for individual control rooms, such as ours, which handles a relatively small number of incidents per year (circa 9,000) may not be the most efficient solution." **Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service**

"There is recognition that the number of emergency calls is reducing each year; that the staffing models are typically expensive as people require a high degree of training, and that some Fire and Rescue Services do not have the capacity to keep developing their control room functions. Previous reviews stated that once the number of incidents attended falls below 20,000 a year the control room function becomes less cost-effective. Many Fire and Rescue Services are now attending fewer incidents than this and in business terms it is clear that we need to reduce the number of control rooms across the UK" **South East Fire Improvement Partnership**

A few suggested a revision to the definition of efficiency – currently expressed in terms of volumes of calls handled per operator. They considered that the wider role of control room staff should be recognised in both this definition and elsewhere – for example, in being the public's first point of contact for help, handling incidents throughout, advising people awaiting rescue and taking on out of scope activities.

> *"the control room function should not be seen in isolation to the rest of the business – it should be seen as the 'communications hub' of the organisation and control staff should be integral to the delivery of all aspects of the service, not just 999."*
> **Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Call handling capability should not be influenced by numbers of calls per operator but by incident types and call duration as this can determine the numbers of operators required to handle calls during certain conditions."* **Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"The importance of out of scope work and its affect on Fire and Rescue Services was never clearly understood by central government."* **West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

Resilience and technology

Most fire and rescue authorities cited robust resilient fallback and overload arrangements as the top priority for resilience in their control services. They needed to deal with spate conditions, major incidents and system failure with total loss arrangements for technology, staff, infrastructure and utilities. A few responses expanded on staff loss, highlighting that this could be through industrial action or a health epidemic as well as staff being unable physically to reach the control room. Planning for business continuity and degradation of service were considered vital functions. The sector is required to undertake business continuity planning as part of its duty under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004.

Interoperability with other Fire and Rescue Services – particularly for data sharing and remote mobilisation – was highlighted as an essential next step in improving resilience by many and developing common standards was believed to be key to this. Four Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities were exploring interoperability with other emergency services.

Physical security was considered less important, although a sensible level of building security was needed.

> *"The most important aspect of resilience is to improve call handling capability combined with interoperability of communications."* **Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Without central government leadership and guidance Fire and Rescue Service control rooms could miss the opportunity to develop interoperability and shared platforms between services and regions"* **Kent Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Interoperability and the need for network solutions for mobilising should still be considered as a top priority for the government as 46 English Fire and Rescue Services 'doing their own thing' will just perpetuate the current problems and create a future sustainability issue"* **Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Authority**
>
> *"We believe that the physical security of the building is less critical and the over-engineering of the regional control centres has added significantly to their cost."* **Dorset Fire Authority**

Changes since 2004

In response to the question about the main changes since 2004 – when FiReControl began – the principal themes from the responses were:

- Advances in technology

- The increased importance of efficiency with the need to find savings in the face of budget cuts – although the definition of efficiency in respect of control rooms was questioned (see page 23)

- Increased and more effective working with partners.

Many thought the advances in technology now enabled FiReControl's objectives to be achieved in alternative ways that are cost effective and resilient. These advances have also eroded the benefits of the technology that the project would have delivered. Three Fire and Rescue Services said they were already using all this advanced technology – but others said they would value having it now. An automatic vehicle location system (AVLS) and upgraded mobile data terminals were mentioned most frequently.

"The current Government's budget reduction plans and the financial pressures being felt by public sector organisations including Fire and Rescue Authorities are obvious signs that the need for improved efficiency is an even higher priority than it was when the FiReControl Project was initiated in 2004." **Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

"Improved technological advances over the lifespan of the project mean that there are alternative options to consider now. Resilience can be enhanced by having suitable arrangements with other Fire and Rescue Services to provide fallback and overload capabilities." **West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service**

"Because of the timescales involved and the pace of technological change, the FiReControl Project failed to keep up that pace, the result being that many services have already exceeded the capabilities that the Project would have delivered." **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**

"Avon Fire Authority still remains of the view that advances in technology and efficiency were deliverable via the Airwave and Firelink systems" **Avon Fire and Rescue Service**

Theme 3: Collaboration, common standards and future fire and rescue service plans

A total of 50 of the 61 responses answered the question about their preferred approach to the delivery of fire and rescue control services in the future. Of these 84 per cent (42 responses) supported the approach of greater collaboration – locally determined – with some central government support. A total of 64 per cent (27 responses) of these responses combined the collaborative approach with a requirement for a common set of national standards (technical and/or procedural).

The Fire and Rescue Services in Wales and Scotland were mentioned as examples to follow for collaboration.

Collaboration with not only other Fire and Rescue Services but also other emergency services and local services requiring a 24/7 call handling facility was also suggested.

> *"For the public, the best outcome in terms of service delivery is almost certainly a national provision, essentially FiReControl. However this will place considerable financial burden on the tax payer, will take considerable time to deliver and is unlikely to receive universal support across the sector. … Given the work undertaken to support FiReControl there will be few services that cannot see the value of a more integrated approach and it is the view of this Service that change must take place."* **Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority**
>
> *"Leadership and direction is again required but with solutions being decided locally, therefore the directions taken may diverge unless the key messages are very clear and incentives given."* **Surrey Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"This approach, with Government support, will materialise as a combination of local determination with central funding and support, adhering to national standards owned by the sector."* **Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority**

Common standards

Many of those looking at greater collaboration with other fire and rescue services, short of sharing a control room, saw great resilience benefits in being able to mobilise resources and manage incidents in their 'buddy's' area. Interoperability with common technical and procedural standards and protocols was seen as essential to achieve this. A revised version of GD92 (15 responses mentioned this) and the work on standard operating procedures (SOPs) were mentioned frequently as contributors. The need for national standards for resilience was also mentioned.

The majority of those advocating standards considered they should be sector led although many saw a supporting role for central government (see *Theme 5*).

"History shows that the mere existence of these standards does not necessarily lead to their adoption and for that reason, it is considered that the Department for Communities and Local Government do have a central role in mandating or incentivising the adoption of such standards" **Royal Berkshire Fire Authority**

"We would want to discuss … the potential need for a standards framework with the likelihood that it would not be mandatory" **Chief Fire Officers' Association**

"To secure resilience between partner/ buddy control rooms it is essential to develop national standards." **Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority**

"the government should determine standard specifications to promote connectivity and interoperability so that different platforms can better integrate and provide more resilience in the future." **Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service**

"National standards across the sector should be agreed within the sector" **Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Authority**

"The development of technical standards and standard operating platforms should be led and directed by central government in our view. The risks of disparate local solutions are neither efficient nor effective" **Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Authority**

"The existence of the standards on their own is not enough, however, and central government support will be essential to promote their adoption." **Oxfordshire County Council**

"The Government could act as a stakeholder in the sign-off of local projects for changes to control room mobilising in order to assess the degrees to which the suggested common standards are being delivered." **Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

"We believe that central Government can play a role in supporting technical enhancements into Fire and Rescue Service control rooms in several ways – through the setting and then maintaining of technical standards/specifications" **Fortek Computers Ltd**

"Government should support the development of national resilience standards and for the technical and operational elements to be led by the Chief Fire Officers Association. Central government funding to the Chief Fire Officers Association to support this work will be vital to achieve the objectives required." **Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Authority**

Future Fire and Rescue Service plans

The Fire and Rescue Services and Authorities that gave information on their own plans were either actively exploring or had in place greater collaboration in some form. Plans were at widely different stages – from initial exploration to full business case – and included:

- Merging control room services with one or more Fire and Rescue Services or outsourcing their control room service to another Fire and Rescue Service

- Strengthening 'buddying' and mutual aid arrangements with neighbouring Fire and Rescue Services

- Setting up 'buddying' arrangements with a distant Fire and Rescue Service unlikely to be affected by the same major incident – eg flooding, flu epidemic

- Exploring greater collaboration and sharing services with other local emergency services

- Offering 24/7 emergency call handling services to other local public services requiring this level of service.

A number intended to retain their local standalone control room and were not looking for merging or sharing arrangements with other Fire and Rescue Services although might pursue this option with local emergency services.

Some were exploring innovative, more efficient approaches to staffing such as staff pooling, demand-led and day crewing. A few were looking at ways of outsourcing the control room service through a different business model (ie not to another Fire and Rescue Service), but others were uncomfortable with any type of outsourcing for a function that delivered a statutory duty and provided part of their command and control process.

"Services that choose not to enter into collaborative arrangements should be publicly accountable for their reasons in not doing so" **West Midlands Fire and Rescue Service**

"Humberside Fire and Rescue Service is currently investigating opportunities to provide outsourced functions to other Fire and Rescue Services and other forms of income generation to support control room efficiencies." **Humberside Fire Authority**

"From 1 April 2011 Hertfordshire was fully networked with Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service utilising a buddy system. This facilitates the following: automatic overflow of calls to buddy partner in busy periods, such as spate conditions, large call volumes to an incident; calls handled on behalf of each other and passed utilising inter-cad system. … Norfolk and Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Services do not have a direct geographical border to each other and there is a good geographical separation between the two. Therefore spate conditions are unlikely to occur at the same time. The buddy system allows more Control Operators to be available to deal with the volume of calls." **Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service**

"Our vision for the future of fire control in Dorset is a 'buddying' arrangement with one or more neighbouring fire and rescue services. We believe such a model provides the best balance between resilience, efficiency, local management and accountability. Technological solutions which enable a 'buddying' arrangement with other fire and rescue services can provide a resilient back up for existing control rooms. …

A 'demand-led crewing' model would have been adopted by the regional control centre and a similar model could be used for fire and rescue control rooms. There is a marked reduction in call levels and workload during night shifts and it would be possible to reduce crewing between certain hours providing there was an alternative (a 'buddy') for unexpected spate conditions. It may even be possible for one or two of the control rooms to only be crewed during the day." **Dorset Fire Authority**

"A number of Fire and Rescue Services have Silver Command Centres, which provide operational resilience linked to their fire control function. … How this could/would be incorporated into a host outsourced model is not readily apparent to us." **Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority**

"Responsibility for day to day service delivery should then be outsourced wherever possible, in order to drive out further efficiencies … this Authority believes that a full range of options should then be considered." **London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority**

Theme 4: Priorities for available funding

The completion of the Firelink project was the clear priority for funding (for 35 out of 43 expressing a view). The primary driver for this was the perceived need to provide a robust bearer for data and more control over voice services so Fire and Rescue Services could better manage and reduce Airwave usage costs. However, timing was an issue. Fire and Rescue Authorities were at different stages of developing and implementing future plans and recognised the benefits of upgrading the interfaces into Airwave only when these plans had been confirmed.

Beyond this, there was no consistency on funding and the responses showed considerable variation in ordering next priorities – there were 20 different combinations given of the four suggested priorities, as well as additional suggestions. This possibly reflects the variety in Fire and Rescue Authorities' own future plans. Suggestions included priority funding for:

- Collaboration
- Transition and restructuring costs
- Development of common standards and their adoption
- Upgrading current systems
- Upgrading accommodation.

"Consideration should be given to supporting those Fire and Rescue Services planning to make significant efficiencies by working with other services. This could include allowing the Fire and Rescue Service involved to use the savings generated by the reduction in Firelink control room equipment needed as well as providing funds for transitional activities. … There may be an opportunity to ensure that those Fire and Rescue Services which make savings by working collaboratively have the savings ring-fenced for their activities." **East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service**

"The Department for Communities and Local Government should meet the full costs for the maintenance and, where necessary, upgrading of existing control room technology where it has become necessary as a result of the cancellation of the FiReControl project." **Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority**

"If the Department for Communities and Local Government are prescribing a solution, they need to pick up the costs. If there is no prescription, then costs would fall where decisions lie as choice would be for us." **Devon and Somerset Fire Authority**

"Government should recognise that there are authorities who took decisions with accommodation and infrastructure that were based on the anticipated move to the FiReControl network. This is an important consideration and should be taken into account in determining funding support." **Suffolk County Council**

"Technological capabilities today are far in advance of those available when the project was first defined, but technological improvement comes at significant cost." **Humberside Fire Authority**

Some responses pointed out that investment in new systems and accommodation had been postponed in the expectation of FiReControl being delivered, leading to systems needing to be replaced and accommodation upgraded when budgets were most under pressure. Demand on suppliers in the market would also be high. Others acknowledged the continuing funding streams for maintaining and replacing control room equipment and accommodation during the lifetime of the project.

"… many services have not invested in control room technology during the life cycle of the FiReControl project in expectation of a provided solution. The timing of the project closure set against budget reductions will provide services with a significant challenge, and may possibly affect their ability to deliver effective services" **West Midlands Fire Service**

"While we accept that the service has continued to receive funding to maintain existing control rooms during the period of the FiReControl project each service will be in a different position with regard to the viability of existing systems." **London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority**

"If other Fire and Rescue Services have consciously chosen not to upgrade their mobilising functions for the duration of the [FiReControl] project, the money that they would have spent must remain in reserves or must have been spent on alternative projects" **Surrey County Council**

The Government was urged by many to be flexible in funding arrangements in order to cater for the variations in individual Fire and Rescue Authority plans and the stage they had reached. Some felt that the Government should avoid encouraging ill-thought through plans based on 'knee jerk' reactions to the project closure through funding arrangements that favoured early applicants. On the other hand, those that believed their business case was well developed called for the Government to distribute any available funding rapidly.

Nearly all fire and rescue authorities called for clarity on funding as a top priority so they could progress their plans with some certainty. This also included clarity on long-term financial support, beyond the three-year Spending Review period. Some were concerned that the Fire and Rescue Authorities would, in effect, 'bear' the legacy costs of the control centre buildings.

"The Local Government Group urges the Government to clarify the amount of central funding that will be made available for upgrading control services as soon as possible to help Fire and Rescue Authorities make an informed decision. We accept that the Department for Communities and Local Government is seeking to achieve a balance between operational need, fairness and value for the tax payer"
Local Government Group

"It is essential that greater clarification is provided in order for Fire and Rescue Authorities to make a more informed judgement when developing their longer-term replacement plans and service delivery strategy." **Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority**

"Fire and Rescue control rooms should be a key part of resilience arrangements and we consider that these arrangements will not be effective if Fire and Rescue Services feel pressurised to introduce short-term solutions instead of properly thought out and planned long-term arrangements" **Fire Officers' Association**

"In general, we are concerned that the level of support available to fire and rescue authorities may be limited because of central government's intentions to mitigate the financial burden associated with the current control centre buildings and the need to complete the Airwave installation." **Suffolk County Council**

Theme 5: The future role for central government

The main roles for central government identified among the responses were:

- Providing funding

- Managing the Airwave/ Firelink contract and the completion of Firelink

- Supporting the development and adoption of sector-led national technical and procedural standards, eg the work in the south east and a revised GD92 (see Theme 3)

- Promoting the Direct Electronic Information Transfer (DEIT) protocols being trialled in Wales.

- Defining and implementing national resilience measures

- Taking forward work on multi-agency collaboration and interoperability arrangements in Whitehall between all the emergency services and other key agencies (eg HM Coastguard, Environment Agency)

> *"Where efficiency is concerned, central government's role should be focused around policy making and securing the necessary inter-government departmental and inter-Service arrangements needed for the efficient operation of control services and to ensure that responders can operate and communicate effectively together at major incidents. … Government should provide endorsement of strategic decisions relating to the national interest and ensure that effective cross-governmental and inter-agency arrangements are established."* **Suffolk County Council**
>
> *"Another essential role for the Department for Communities and Local Government is ensuring efficient and effective management of the Firelink contract and to continue to deliver the full functionality of this."* **Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service**

Other possible roles

A total of 24 responses suggested that, in future, there should be some form of shared procurement. This could be through framework contracts and agreements (such as 'Sprint 2'), or call-off contracts for core control room and mobilising products. The aim would be to ensure value for money, economies of scale, and interoperability through incorporating common standards. Another driver mentioned was to speed up and simplify the procurement of key systems. A total of 15 responses suggested a particular role for central government here. This ranged from purchasing discrete equipment (such as station ends), through developing a policy and framework contracts, to urging the marketplace to produce competing systems that comply with national standards.

> *"The potential role for the government … could include: identification of potential suppliers to save each Fire and Rescue Service researching them individually; national procurement of high speed data links for cost efficiency and resilience of networks."* **West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Centrally developed procurement frameworks will also ensure economies of scale and standardisation of operating equipment."* **Kent and Medway Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Often Fire and Rescue Authorities cannot gain sufficient leverage over the marketplace to be able to drive down cost and as such many technologies are out of reach. Therefore we must look to Government assistance in this issue"* **Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority**
>
> *"We believe central government can help the Fire and Rescue Services in a number of ways: … The use of framework agreements such as 'Sprint 2', managed centrally to speed up and simplify the procurement of command and control systems."* **Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service**

More believed Government had a role in promoting enhanced technology than in supporting work on efficiency – some felt strongly that efficiency was a matter for Fire and Rescue Authorities alone.

> *"We believe that individual authorities are best placed to achieve efficiencies in the delivery of control services and balance these with the requirements for resilience, the maintenance of performance standards and local needs."* **Suffolk County Council**

Among other suggestions of roles for central government, four responses suggested the dissemination of best practice, including through case studies.

> *"Fire Authorities would benefit from central government involvement in disseminating evidence of best practice (such as sharing of concept on staff modelling utilised in FiReControl project)"* **Humberside Fire and Rescue Service**

Theme 6: The options for Firelink

The great majority (83 per cent, 29 responses) who responded and expressed a view (35 responses) on the technical option for Firelink that best met fire and rescue service needs recommended the implementation of a full networked voice and data service to existing control rooms. The next most popular option (4 responses, 11 per cent of those responding) was upgrading the existing Firelink solution to support data. Some suggested reducing costs through sharing an interface between Fire and Rescue Services. The greater levels of collaboration – merging and outsourcing – would also achieve these savings.

> *"In order to support fire and rescue services develop modern control and communications solutions capable of enhancing resilience and efficiency, it is essential that fully integrated voice and data connections to the Airwave network are made available to every fire and rescue service control centre, at whatever scale may be determined locally."* **Chief Fire Officers' Association**
>
> *"The needs of this Authority will only be met if a full networked voice and data connection to whatever control room solution is agreed as a result of our current scoping and feasibility study. We are content to continue with the interim connection until the new control room solution is introduced."* **Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service**
>
> *"Regarding Firelink Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service would see Option 3 as most viable, a full networked voice and data connection into existing control rooms. … There is also the option of making key Fire and Rescue Service access hubs to the Airwave network, an approach Lancashire would support."* **Lancashire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority**
>
> *"The cost of the SAN-H equipment could be reduced if it is 'hosted' by one fire and rescue service for a number of neighbouring services using the networked capability and we would want to investigate whether a shared Incident Command and Control System would also be technically possible. Firelink has much to offer in meeting services' mobile data strategies, particularly to exploit the potential for data communication and mapping data linked to incident location and operations risk information."* **Dorset Fire Authority**

Section 4

Response from the Department for Communities and Local Government

The Department is grateful to all those who responded to the consultation. While a wide variety of views was expressed, there was a high degree of consensus on some key points, especially around the preferred approach for the future, top priority for funding and lessons learnt from the FiReControl project. Many responses highlighted the early decisions made and approach as the main source of later problems. To remedy issues such as these the Department has taken significant steps in the last few years to improve its project scrutiny, procurement and management skills and processes. In 2007 the Department appointed a Chief Fire and Rescue Adviser to give expert input to policy issues. However many of the lessons highlighted will inform future plans and contribute to improvements in understanding between the Department and fire and rescue sector in future.

The Department has made clear that no solution will be imposed on Fire and Rescue Authorities and this assurance was welcomed. However there is now a clear case for closer collaboration, determined locally, to improve both efficiency and resilience. Enhanced technology can support both aims. Many of those responding identified a positive legacy from the project of improved dialogue and collaboration between Fire and Rescue Services. This will be a sound basis for achieving these efficiency and resilience aims that are also essential to building national resilience through local solutions.

Most of those responding considered that resilience, efficiency and enhanced technology were as important today as in 2004 when the project began. The National Security Strategy (*A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty*[6]) sets out the four priority risks of international terrorism, a major accident or natural hazard, hostile attacks upon UK cyber space and an international military crisis. Funding available should be used to support the country's response to these risks as well as locally defined priorities for resilience and efficiency.

One key outcome from the consultation anticipated by those in Fire and Rescue Authorities was how any available funding would be distributed. The preferences expressed and comments made have been carefully assessed and the resulting scheme is set out in the next section (see *Next Steps*). The Department is grateful for the input and co-operation of the Local Government Association and the Chief Fire Officers' Association in developing this way forward.

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[6]   A Strong Britain in an Age of Uncertainty: The National Security Strategy Cm 7953, October 2010 www.direct.gov.uk/nss

Out of the 42 responses that preferred the approach of greater collaboration, determined locally, with some government support, a total of 27 wanted this to be combined with the development of common technical and procedural standards – the combination was their top priority. A further two put developing standards as their outright first choice. The funding scheme includes an opportunity for the sector to bid for funding to take forward work on standards. The Department believes this should be sector led but will support the adoption of agreed standards through whatever means appropriate on the advice of the sector.

Two particular routes were suggested for developing data transfer standards in the consultation:

- revision of GD92, a well-established and widely used standard in the sector
- promotion, review and roll-out of the Direct Electronic Information Transfer (DEIT) protocol, currently being trialled in Wales.

The DEIT protocol is intended to enable the emergency responder community to quickly and accurately exchange incident logs with each other. In the trial this is currently allowing information to transfer between Fire and Rescue Services in Wales and independently between the Police Forces in Wales. In the next step the participants will explore whether the National Resilience Extranet can be used as an accessible and secure data hub for emergency responders. The initiative could potentially be used more widely and is being taken forward by the Welsh Government, Welsh Joint Emergency Services Group and Cabinet Office.

This is closely linked to wider cross-Government work on multi-agency interoperability. The objective is to produce operational procedures and guidance to enable effective use of new technologies such as Firelink radio systems and the National Resilience Extranet. This work covers all emergency services and first responders across the country, including Scotland and Wales, and is aimed at ensuring that the emergency services are able to operate effectively together when responding to major incidents. The Department continues to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service is well represented in this and other cross-Government work, based on sector advice.

One route for ensuring the adoption of technical standards suggested in the responses was through procurement arrangements. For example, in 1993 the Government had set up a Framework Agreement with four suppliers of communications equipment to supply Fire and Rescue Services through a call-off arrangement – GD92 formed the core common technical standards within this call-off arrangement. This type of model can be used by suppliers to provide confidence that integration to other fire and rescue equipment can be achieved through standard interfaces. The Department believes that the sector is now best placed to develop procurement models that ensure standards are adopted where necessary, so that the benefits of interoperability and collaborative procurement can be realised.

The future of the Fire and Rescue Service National Co-ordination Centre was mentioned in a few responses. Its future location is unaffected by FiReControl's closure as the Centre's move to London had already been proposed by the Chief Fire Officers' Association and agreed by the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority and the Department. However all the anticipated efficiency savings from the move will not now be realised. The Department is working with the London Fire Brigade and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority on future funding and governance issues.

The Government's role in national resilience was discussed in the recent *Fire Futures Reports – Government response*[7]. The Department will be taking forward work, with the sector, on providing clarity on national and local roles in resilience as well as the appropriate assurance mechanism for national resilience. This will be included in the next National Framework.

[7]   *Fire Futures Reports – Government response*, Department for Communities and Local Government, April 2011,
      http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/firefuturesresponse

Section 5

Next steps

The Department is committed to supporting further enhancements to fire and rescue control and mobilisation arrangements in a way that delivers significant improvements to resilience, security and efficiency. The Department's strategy is to build national resilience through local rather than national solutions as the expertise in command and control processes lies with Fire and Rescue Services. To achieve these aims, the Department intends to make available total funding of up to £81 million. As a guideline, this will provide up to £1.8 million in grant funding for each Fire and Rescue Authority in England. Authorities may submit plans for more than £1.8 million if they are able to demonstrate that exceptional resilience benefits would result.

The Department anticipates that this level of funding should be sufficient to support local plans for collaboration and efforts to improve resilience and efficiency through greater shared use of IT infrastructure and applications. It is further expected that this funding should be sufficient to meet local costs of securing the benefits of enhanced data capability, for example through Firelink.

The Department will review plans for value for money and resilience benefits, taking account of the points made in the consultation responses on resilience priorities. A panel may review these plans when further clarification is needed or some aspect might benefit from expert advice.

There was a strong level of support indicated in the responses to the consultation for central government investment in the development by the sector of common procedural and technical standards. As a result the Department intends to make available an additional £1.8 million in total to fund the sector to deliver the project or projects it considers most valuable in this area. Those in the sector wishing to launch other types of initiative that offer significant national benefits for control service coordination and resilience may also apply for this funding.

Further guidance on the funding and process, drawing on the consultation responses, is being circulated to Fire and Rescue Authorities in parallel with publication of this document. The Department will accept returns up to 4 November. Under this proposal the funding will be made available in financial years 2011/12 and 2012/13.

The Department will not be monitoring individual local projects but will need to oversee delivery with the Fire and Rescue Services and assure resilience outcomes. The Department with the sector intends to organise a review conference in early 2012 to give Fire and

Rescue Authorities and Services an opportunity to share experience, develop and disseminate best practice, and identify improvements to national resilience resulting from local plans. The Department is grateful for input from the Local Government Group and Chief Fire Officers' Association in developing the scheme and for their agreement to being part of the oversight process.

The Department will continue discussions on the future use and funding arrangements for the control centre buildings separately from the funding allocation process.

Fire and rescue partners have been informed of work beginning on a revised *Fire and Rescue Service National Framework*[8] that will take forward a number of the wider points made in the responses. The Department will work with the sector to develop and consult on the new Framework. This will define national and local resilience roles, including issues arising in the context of cross-border working interoperability and multi-agency interoperability. It is possible that national resilience could, for example, be taken to encompass those functions and resources required to meet the National Risk Assessment that are beyond those properly covered by local Integrated Risk Management Plans.

These might include response and operational guidance, over and above that within mutual aid agreements, for hazards and threats set out in the National Security Strategy, such as:

- Large scale natural disasters (or local with a national impact)
- Events with potential large-scale casualty implications, or requiring large-scale response, or specialist capability – for example, building collapse, aircraft crashes, terrorist activity
- Chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive incidents.

The Department expects to consult on a draft National Framework document in late 2011. If appropriate, the new strategy for control services may be reflected in the Framework.

Any queries on the consultation responses and next steps should be made to:

Public Enquiries:
mary-ann.auckland@communities.gsi.gov.uk
0303 444 3170

Press Enquiries:
Press.office@communities.gsi.gov.uk
0303 444 1201

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[8]   See *Fire and Rescue Service Bulletin* 12/2011, July 2011, http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/publications/newsletters/

Annex A

List of respondents

Name of organisation	Type of organisation
1. Private Individual	Private individual
2. Avon Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
3. Private Individual	Private individual
4. Private Individual	Private individual
5. Dorset Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
6. Local Government Association (LGA) – Local Government Group	Representative organisation
7. Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
8. Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
9. Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
10. London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA)	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
11. Cornwall Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
12. Kent Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
13. Swissphone	Supplier
14. Fortek Computers Ltd	Supplier
15. Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
16. West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
17. Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
18. Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service

Name of organisation	Type of organisation
19. Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
20. Humberside Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
21. Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
22. Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
23. West Midlands Fire Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
24. Lancashire Combined Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
25. Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
26. North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
27. Motorola	Supplier
28. Wiltshire and Swindon Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
29. Private individual	Private individual
30. Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
31. South East Fire Improvement Partnership (SEFIP)	Geographical partnership
32. Lincolnshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
33. Chief Fire Officers' Association (CFOA)	Representative organisation
34. Isle of Wight Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
35. Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Combined Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
36. Derbyshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
37. Warwickshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
38. North West Fire Control Ltd	Geographical partnership
39. Ordnance Survey	Supplier

Name of organisation	Type of organisation
40. Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
41. Capita	Supplier
42. Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
43. Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
44. Private individual	Private individual
45. Fire Brigades Union	Representative organisation
46. Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
47. Devon and Somerset Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
48. Cassidian	Supplier
49. County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
50. Thames Valley	Geographical partnership
51. Surrey Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
52. Shropshire and Wrekin Fire and Rescue Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
53. Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
54. Northumberland Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
55. West Sussex Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
56. Airwave	Supplier
57. Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
58. Fire Officers' Association (FOA)	Representative organisation
59. Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
60. East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service	Fire and Rescue Authority or Service
61. GeoPlace	Supplier

Annex B

Example quotations to illustrate the flavour of responses

Example quotations are provided, illustrating five of the six main themes:

- Lessons from the FiReControl project

- Resilience, technology and efficiency

- Collaboration, common standards and future fire and rescue service plans

- Priorities for available funding

- The future role for central government.

Theme 1 quotations

Lessons from the FiReControl project

*"… there has been a disjoint between the government logic applied to English
Fire and Rescue Services and other agencies. There have been no similarly onerous
requirements placed on either the police or ambulance services, both of which are at
potentially more risk. … This brought into question the proportionality and cost of the
FiReControl solution."*

<div align="right">Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service</div>

*"We are still unsure why this resilience manifested itself into the development of a highly
secure system and buildings when other emergency service with potentially a higher threat
level continued to work independently in a less secure environment."*

<div align="right">Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service</div>

*"The Department for Communities and Local Government failed from the outset
to engage the service as an equal partner, dictating rather than working on a
partnership basis"*

<div align="right">Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service</div>

"It must be accepted that the decisions taken in the early days of the project were taken by the Department for Communities and Local Government officials against the advice of the Fire and Rescue Service community"

Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Authority

"A lesson learned for the future would be to facilitate greater sector involvement at an earlier stage and to support fire authority corporate and budget planning processes through timely, open and transparent planning processes."

Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority

"The overall project scope of FiReControl was not properly defined at the start and not enough time was spent involving the fire sector in the early stages of this project."

Kent Fire and Rescue Service

"Many decisions appeared, to the broader user community, to have been taken by the Department for Communities and Local Government in conjunction with consultants and a small unrepresentative group of users"

Tyne and Wear Fire and Rescue Authority

"We agree … that it was difficult if not impossible to agree a common approach that satisfied everyone."

Greater Manchester Fire and Rescue Service

"Much of the original business case did make strategic sense"

South East Fire Improvement Partnership

"The concept in the main was right but the execution was seriously flawed."

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Authority

"Early convergence work proved more difficult than anticipated – and became an unrealisable wish list which had a significant impact on delivery."

Humberside Fire Authority

"It is recognised that there were varied positions taken by different stakeholders in regard to partnership working and the assessment that partnership working was difficult to achieve is recognised"

Northwest FiReControl

"Early problems were there because of a lack of Fire and Rescue Service involvement and understanding of the Fire and Rescue Service business needs."

West Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service

"The lack of early engagement with the sector led to a subsequent loss of trust which was not helped by a set of IT early deliverables that failed to meet the user need. … Overall, engagement with the user community, particularly in the early stages of the project, was lacking, creating resentment and a lack of confidence that the end result would deliver the required capability"

<div align="right">Oxfordshire County Council</div>

"Communications only improved towards the end of the project"

<div align="right">Lancashire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority</div>

"The project did establish a basis upon which to standardise the collection of data and its provision with the service to meet operational needs without geographical boundaries."

<div align="right">Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service</div>

"During the early stages of the FiReControl project we saw a number of Fire and Rescue Services enthusiastically promoting several of the ideas that emerged, to a point where they saw them as essential requirements in their own mobilising system. These included the adoption of the National Land and Property Gazetteer, attribute mobilising and the capability for collaboration between consenting Fire and Rescue Services"

<div align="right">Fortek Computers Ltd</div>

"Local government's National Land and Property Gazetteer is now over ten years old and is arguably the most successful e-government initiative in England and Wales. … This is not a project which is delivered to local government by an external party but an ongoing initiative underpinned by local consensus and continual improvement, and as such avoided problems with restrictive early decision making. This approach was recognised at an early stage by the FiReControl project who engaged unreservedly with the local government community to deliver improvement for mutual benefit. We would like to place on record our thanks to the project for their valued involvement."

<div align="right">GeoPlace</div>

"There were a number of aspects of the project that we believe were successful and will be carried forward … examples are that of the approach to 'ways of working' adopted within the south east region which is producing common operating procedures and the work to complete business process maps and action plans which will be adapted for use in any future control room services project."

<div align="right">Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority</div>

"The project has increased the understanding of the Fire and Rescue Service in areas such as data security, Critical National Infrastructure (CNI) and command and control systems in general."

<div align="right">County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service</div>

Theme 2 quotations

Resilience, technology and efficiency

"the three objectives of resilience, enhanced technology and efficiency remain valid but one additional objective should be added: interoperability"

<div align="right">Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Fire Authority</div>

"During the period in which the FiReControl project was running, each of the fire and rescue services within this collaboration have made the essential investments in their control and communications systems to ensure operational continuity and the discharge of statutory functions. We have not however, invested unnecessarily in improvements and enhanced technology where these were promised by the FiReControl project, although a great deal of investment has gone into preparing to integrate systems and data with the Regional Control Centres. This has left us in a strong position on which to move forward but we now face a significant demand for investment in technology in order to improve the resilience and capability of our control services."

<div align="right">Thames Valley Area</div>

"We understand that the Fire and Rescue Services call rate has reduced significantly since that time through active education programmes and community safety work and that, by instigating a range of challenge processes, the number of incidents attended has also dropped over this period."

<div align="right">Capita</div>

"Firecontrol was revolutionary in approach, as it looked to improve the response services in many areas. Fire and Rescue Services viewed all the improvement in call taking, prioritisation of incidents, attribute-based mobilising, Automatic Vehicle Location System, Mobile Data Terminal software and fallback facilities favourably. Those Fire and Rescue Services looking to replace systems due to Firecontrol project closure will probably look to incorporate many of the facilities."

<div align="right">East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service</div>

Theme 3 quotations

Collaboration, common standards and future fire and rescue service plans

"The development and maintenance of standards of technology or protocols would be a major role for central government"

<div align="right">Isles of Scilly Fire and Rescue Service</div>

"We are considering demand based crewing across the three Fire and Rescue Services [Hampshire, Wiltshire and Dorset] and the possibility that one or more of the controls will be day crewed."

<p style="text-align: right">Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service</p>

Theme 4 quotations

Priorities for available funding

"We believe that the cost of integrating the control room into our new service headquarters should be met from central government … we believe the costs of the upgrade [to the fire control system] and for the associated telephony hardware and software should be met by central government."

<p style="text-align: right">Dorset Fire and Rescue Authority</p>

Theme 5 quotations

The future role for central government

"Central government involvement would be needed to facilitate or lead on the identification of efficiencies across individual Fire and Rescue Services boundaries. Without central direction, we doubt that fire and rescue authorities and their Fire and Rescue Services will look beyond their local span of control when attempting to identify efficiencies."

<p style="text-align: right">Fire Officers' Association</p>

"Government should not be involved in the procurement or management of the IT aspects of any future proposals"

<p style="text-align: right">Lancashire Combined Fire and Rescue Authority</p>

"There remains a role for the Department for Communities and Local Government on developing common specifications to support the procurement process and to facilitate interoperability and connectivity."

<p style="text-align: right">Cumbria Fire and Rescue Service</p>

"implementing a national minimum standard of staffing across all brigades"

<p style="text-align: right">Fire Brigades Union</p>