

Communities and Local Government Committee

Select Committee Announcement

House of Commons London SW1P 3JA

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FiReControl: inadequately planned, poorly executed and badly managed

The Government's programme to replace 46 local fire and rescue service control rooms with nine purpose-built regional control centres has been inadequately planned, poorly executed, and badly managed, says the Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

Launching a report of an inquiry into the FiReControl project, CLG Committee Chair Dr Phyllis Starkey said, "The original aims and expected benefits of this scheme were, in our view, sound. But the department has clearly not learned from its previous mistakes with the New Dimension project. FiReControl is yet another catalogue of further poor judgement and mismanagement."

On balance, however, given the investment of public funds already committed, and the benefits that will accrue, MPs conclude that DCLG should press ahead with the FireControl project so long as Ministers can agree urgently a viable project plan that will see the project go live by a target date of mid-2011 and in which the main stakeholders can have confidence.

After examining the project closely the Committee concludes that the future of a prompt and efficient and modern mobilisation system for the fire service has been put at substantial risk because:

- The original agreement with the IT contractor was ill-suited to the nature of the project and there was insufficient consultation with end-users.
- High staff turnover within DCLG, especially at a senior level, compromised the Department's ability to manage the project effectively.
- Relationships with major stakeholders and contractual partners have been mishandled. A lack of openness, collaboration and explanation by DCLG means many Fire and Rescue Authorities now have profound reservations about whether the new regional system will deliver a more efficient, safer service.
- Escalating costs and severe delays look set to leave several key Fire and Rescue Authorities managing their migration to a new system at the time they should be preparing for the high-profile safety concerns presented by the Olympic Games in 2012.
- The fate of the project remains further exposed by an adversarial relationship between DCLG and the main IT contractor, EADS.

Lastly, the committee also condemns the Government's refusal to allow the Committee sight of independent management reviews for the project—even in confidence. Commenting on this point, Dr Starkey adds, "This refusal implies the department is deeply insecure about its handling of the FiReControl project and unwilling to be accountable. This is regrettable."

Looking forward, the committee concludes that the excessive cost of abandoning the project - an extra £8 million more than it will cost to complete – indicates the Department should continue with the project so long as it also:

- examines alternatives and provides assurances that FiReControl represents the best viable option for the future of Fire and Rescue Services;
- resolves its contractual dispute with EADS and implements a viable project plan;
- addresses the shortcomings in its management of the project;
- consults fully with FRS staff and professionals to define end-user requirements
- provides assurances that the safety and security of the Olympic Games will not be compromised by the roll-out of new Regional Control Centres

In addition, the committee calls on DCLG urgently to draw up and consult on contingency plans for any further failures in the FiReControl programme to ensure ongoing safe and effective fire and rescue services cover across the whole country whether or not the regional control centres are eventually delivered.

NOTES

FiReControl is the name of DCLG's project to replace the existing local **fire** and **rescue control** rooms with nine amalgamated Regional Control Centres (RCCs).

The full report is available here:

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmcomloc/352/352.pdf>

FURTHER INFORMATION:

Committee Membership is as follows:

Dr Phyllis Starkey MP (Chair, Lab), Sir Paul Beresford MP (Con), Mr Clive Betts MP (Lab), John Cummings MP (Lab), Andrew George (Lib Dem), Mr Greg Hands MP (Con), Anne Main MP (Con), Dr John Pugh MP (Lib Dem), Alison Seabeck MP (Lab), Andrew Slaughter MP (Lab), Mr Neil Turner MP (Lab)

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