

# Plan

# B

The Government has rejected the FBU's alternative proposals for designated 'Resilience Controls' utilising the existing control structure. While we reject many of their criticisms, including the claim it would be more expensive, we are pleased to propose another variation

**T**his variation is based on a combination of the union's own proposals, the Government's Interim solution and part of the solution proposed under its plans for Regional Control Centres. This variation is very easy to cost, we know the key elements work and that the proposal is easily achievable in a much faster timescale than the Government's FireControl proposals which are now at least 3 years behind schedule.

The benefits of this variation – which we will call Plan B – include:

- Greater cost certainty for all the key elements
- Much cheaper, less than the £44 million the Government plans to spend on consultants alone for FireControl
- Much quicker to implement
- Far fewer risks
- All elements are fully proven

It is not a nationally networked solution. But as this is not being demanded of either the police or the ambulance controls – which also need to respond to the same major incidents – it can hardly be an absolute necessity for the fire service.

This variation would also utilise much of the detailed background work undertaken by the FireControl Project. Plan B is clearly another viable alternative to FireControl.

It once again undermines the Government

position that there is no alternative to their own proposals. We have already come up with two.

## Plan B

A union which represents personnel on the very frontline of dealing with major incidents recognises those personnel have a vested interest in ensuring an organised and planned response to major incidents including multiple, co-ordinated terrorist attacks whose aftermath may last for months. The ability to deal with such incidents also has to be balanced against the need to deal with the 'routine' emergencies which happen on a daily basis.

The key components of Plan B are the existing emergency fire control rooms, boosted by at least two National Co-ordination Centres (NCCs) – which are being promoted by the Government even under the FireControl project – and enhanced by upgrading technology in those control rooms the Government has identified as requiring it.

It is now clear the Regional Control Centres on their own cannot do what was originally intended and will be enhanced by at least two permanent NCCs based within regional controls. It is the same type of link as currently exists between the interim NCC which is based in the existing West Yorkshire control room.



A key element of Plan B will be based on the Government's plan for at least two national co-ordination centres (NCCs). An interim NCC was on standby during the Carlisle Floods of January 2005 (pictured)

The cost of this facility is around £90,000 a month, according to the Government's published figures. It has only been used once so far, to co-ordinate the response of the New Dimension equipment to Buncefield while the Herts control co-ordinated the rest of the brigade's assets in dealing with hundreds of other responses to emergencies. It was on standby to deal with the Carlisle floods and on standby if the attacks in London on 7 July had escalated.

## Key role

The Government describes the interim NCC as playing a "key role" in any co-ordinated national response to a major incident. The NCC has been widely praised by Government, is already fully operational and works very effectively alongside existing emergency fire controls.

Even if the proposals for regional controls go ahead, the Government now belatedly



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accepts that at least two of these National Co-ordinating Centres will also be needed. FireControl Project Fire and Rescue Service (England) Concept of Operations for Regional Control Centres (page 18 paragraph 66), DCLoG 27 June 2006 states: "One or more of the RCCs will house a National Co-ordination Centre (NCC), which will co-ordinate the response to major incidents (including requesting the mobilisation of New Dimension assets via their Home RCC). The role of the NCC is still under consideration, based on experience of operating the Interim NCC hosted by West Yorkshire FRS."

The same commitment has been made in the Government's response to the Select Committee report. The cost difference between what the union is proposing (2 NCCs) and what the Government is proposing (2 NCCs) is therefore nil.

Getting reliable information on the number of existing controls which need tech-

nology upgrading is difficult. Let us assume that 20 controls need such an upgrading.

Specific experience shows the last upgrading to a Fortek system in Merseyside (highly praised by Government) came in under budget at a little over £650,000. That is in one of the largest brigades in the country. To upgrade 20 controls would involve costs totalling between £13 million at the bottom end and around £20 million at the top end, far less than FireControl will spend on consultants.

#### Major incidents

It would not be a homogenous networked system which will make it more resilient and much more responsive to the requirements of local brigades. The need for a networked system is being over-stated as neither the police nor ambulance plan to network their systems and they are as involved as the fire service in responding to major incidents. They do not see the lack of networked systems

as being a weakness.

The FireControl Project is not even scheduled to be completed until around 2012, 11 years after 9/11. We need the maximum achievable resilience now, not in 2012 or beyond.

**STOP PRESS:** As *Firefighter* went to press, the Government slipped out the revised Business Case for FireControl. Despite 3 years of mitigation work and £20 million in consultancy fees the project now has greater risk attached to it than it did 2 years ago. Many of the key costs are left out including the huge rental costs of the new buildings which the FBU estimates to be a total of £360 million over the period of the contract. This overwhelms the cost of the IT which the Government estimates to be around £160 million. The estimated cost of upgrading existing controls is around £500,000 for each of those controls which need it.

More details will follow.