

WRITTEN MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

From Bob Neill MP/ Baroness Hanham

20 December 2010

Fire and Rescue Service

I would like to inform the House about recent developments on the FiReControl Project.

This is the third part of the last Government's resilience programme and set out to replace the standalone control rooms in England's Fire and Rescue Services with a national network of nine control centres. The aim was to improve national resilience, interoperability and efficiency as well as to enhance the technology available to the Fire and Rescue Service.

Many Hon Members will be aware that, for some time, the project has experienced delays and delivery problems.

The progress of the project has caused serious concern, and so in June this year I made it clear to the main FiReControl contractor, Cassidian (formerly EADS Defence & Security), that the main IT system must now be delivered to time, cost and quality. At this point, we activated a key milestone in their contract requiring the main IT system to be completed in three control centres by mid-2011.

We told Cassidian that no additional taxpayers' money could be invested in this project, nor would delivery of a system of reduced quality or functionality be acceptable.

Following extensive discussion with Cassidian, we have jointly concluded, with regret, that the requirements of the project cannot be delivered to an acceptable timeframe. Therefore the best outcome for the taxpayer and the fire and rescue community is for the contract to be terminated with immediate effect. Cassidian and the Department for Communities and Local Government have reached an acceptable settlement over this although the details will remain commercially confidential.

I know many people in the Fire and Rescue Service and in Fire and Rescue Authorities have devoted considerable time and expertise to this project, especially those who have served on governance and working groups, directors of the local authority controlled companies, advisers from the Chief Fire Officers' Association, Fire and Rescue Service secondees to the project and other staff involved from the fire and rescue community, and many technical and resilience experts. I would like to take this opportunity of thanking all these people for their contribution.

Over the next few weeks we intend to identify the extent to which any legacy assets from the project, including the control centre buildings, can be used for

the benefit of the Fire and Rescue Service and local communities in future. We will also be making arrangements for maintaining products already delivered.

The Department will cease funding activities directly associated with the project as quickly as is compatible with organising an orderly closing down of the project. We recognise that Fire and Rescue Authorities will now wish to review their control arrangements in the light of today's decision. This Government does not intend to impose any solution for the future of control room services.

We will, however, start to consult the fire and rescue sector soon on how best the Government can support them, if at all, in developing their alternative plans based on the principles of localism, ensuring public safety, building up national resilience and delivering value for taxpayers' money. These continue to be our overriding priorities.

I know that the uncertainty around the future of this project has been frustrating and unsettling for the fire and rescue community and those closely concerned with their interests. My objective has been to deliver operational certainty for the Fire and Rescue Service and financial certainty for the taxpayer. Today's decision will deliver that objective and I will continue to keep the House informed of progress.