

CABINET – 24 MAY 2011**FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR CALL RECEIPT, MOBILISING & INCIDENT MANAGEMENT FOR OXFORDSHIRE FIRE & RESCUE SERVICE****Report by Deputy Chief Fire Officer – Fire & Rescue Service****Introduction**

1. Arrangements for call receipt, mobilising and incident management, commonly referred to as the “Control Room”, are an integral part of all Fire and Rescue Services. The effectiveness of these arrangements dictates the quality of services offered to the public measured by speed and weight of response to incidents. They also have a significant bearing on the creation of a safe system of work framework for responding fire-fighters and other emergency services.
2. This central importance is reflected in the Fire and Rescue Service Act 2004 (FSA 2004) which specifically highlights Fire Authority’s statutory duty to make effective arrangements for dealing with calls for help and for summoning personnel for fires, road traffic incidents and other emergencies.
3. In addition to the core activities, Fire Control staff also provide a wider suite of supporting actions including out of hours points of contact, performance reporting and administrative duties. Any future arrangements must also re-engineer these activities.
4. Under the previous government’s mandatory national FiReControl project, Oxfordshire Fire & Rescue Service expected Control Room functions to be replaced by a regionally provided service. Whilst politically opposed to the project, unless all reservations could be addressed, Oxfordshire Fire Authority Members permitted Officers to work constructively with the project so as to secure as much benefit as would be possible and address areas of concern. Extensive work had been undertaken since 2004 and recently some of the early deliverables have been provided. Funding for most of this activity was provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)
5. The original timeline of 2007 was superseded following several national delays¹ with a final transfer of function date planned of 2012/13.
6. On 21st December DCLG formally announced the cancellation of the FiReControl project, resulting in the loss of the nationally provided function.
7. The existence of the FiReControl project had resulted in the cessation of medium and long term planning to replace local control room functions.

¹ Initially to 2009 then to 2011 and then finally to 2012/13

However, proactive management actions were taken in Oxfordshire to extend the lifespan of its equipment to meet the requirements of the repeatedly delayed timetable². This approach was clearly the most cost effective under the circumstances as they arose.

8. However, recognising the statutory duty to deliver effective arrangements for dealing with calls and summoning personnel and the critical nature of the control room function, this approach was not appropriate universally. Where critical components were assessed at significant risk of failure, County Council funding has been deployed for targeted renewals which themselves were procured with consideration for potential opportunities for their redeployment after the transfer to the regional solution.
9. This approach can be reasonably expected to sustain the current lifespan of the existing Control function to 2013/14. At that time a significant component of the current system is likely to become unsupported by the manufacturer. This represents an unacceptable risk to the organisation in carrying out its statutory duties.
10. It is therefore essential that the organisation urgently considers options for the future provision of the control room function including its technical systems.
11. It should also be noted that in addition to work on systems, continued information provision and support to staff was provided throughout the lifespan of the FiReControl project. This resulted in the retention of a competent and experienced workforce which is a prerequisite of continued efficiency and resilience. It is essential that this approach continues whilst future options are being considered.
12. It should be stressed that despite a need to plan for replacement, the current system is considered resilient. The systems components are regularly monitored, the hardware replaced on a regular basis and the software continues to be supported by the manufacturer under contract. Fallback arrangements, including the use of a secondary control facility is available within Oxfordshire with a further level of support available from our "buddy" Fire and Rescue Service (Gloucestershire).

Information

DCLG Consultation

13. DCLG has undertaken a consultation exercise to determine what, if any, Government involvement there should be in the future solution for the provision of control room services. The initial impression is that the Government supports collaborative solutions which have significant benefits in reducing continued DCLG financial liabilities for which they remain responsible, even though the project is cancelled. It also intimates that by

² The main system components were originally procured in 1996 with an expectation of a 10 year lifespan. Selective renewals and creation of ancillary support systems allowed progressive lifespan extensions to meet the 2012/13 anticipated timeframe resulting in a system that is now 15 years old.

reducing national liability there may be consequential funding available for Fire and Rescue Authorities to use in delivering replacement solutions.

14. The consultation covers the potential for individual or collective FRS use of the 9 buildings already provided as part of the project. Fortunately Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), as part owner of the South East Fire and Rescue Control Centre Limited Company, did not accept transfer of the property lease to the Company and therefore there is no ongoing responsibility for the building which remains with DCLG. The facility in Fareham Hampshire is not considered of any interest or material benefit to Oxfordshire or any potential collaborative venture that can be reasonably envisaged. This does have an impact on the DCLG financial position as it is understood that the 25 year contracts have no break clause facility.
15. The consultation also covers technical details of the transfer arrangements for early deliverables and the continued provision of the Airwave, the digital radio system, which will require extensive integration into current or future control rooms.
16. Oxfordshire took opportunities to enhance its systems and resilience by adopting the early delivery of Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) allowing risk information to be provided to operational fire-fighters en-route or at incidents and renewing all of its “alerting” and “turn out” equipment located in its 24 fire stations. Work will continue to transfer contracts, instigate ongoing maintenance arrangements and determine financial effects. Meanwhile, the benefits of these early deliverables are tangible and continue to provide real value to the OFRS and the public.
17. Oxfordshire County Council, acting as the Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA), responded to the consultation following Member endorsement, highlighting expectations that DCLG will act responsibly in assisting FRAs to deliver replacement functionality to meet their statutory responsibilities. In addition a joint consultation response, approved by respective Members, was submitted by the three Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Services (Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Royal Berkshire). The DCLG response to the consultation returns is currently awaited but anticipated imminently³.

Oxfordshire requirements

18. In considering future options it is essential that defined outcomes are identified to measure potential options against. These have been determined from the early stages of the FiReControl project and include:
 - The ongoing provision / utilisation of competent, experienced and professional staff
 - Improved efficiency in day to day operations including fall back arrangements and interoperability with other partners such as Thames

³ It is understood that the Local Government Elections have delayed publication

Valley Police, Southern Counties Ambulance Service and other Category 1 responders under the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (CCA 2004)

- Increased ability to deal with peaks in demand such as those encountered in the July 2007 Oxfordshire flooding event
- Cost effectiveness measured by overall costs and by cost per incident dealt with
- Opportunities for exploiting future developments including expansion of activities such as wider OCC Emergency Planning functions and out of hours arrangements for urgent calls to the Customer Service Centre
- Opportunities for exploiting future developments in providing services to third parties including other Fire and Rescue Services
- The provision and use of modern technology such as:
 - Competence/asset based mobilising
 - Automatic vehicle location and optimum resource mobilising
 - Enhanced information service for fixed line and mobile emergency calls, to identify the geographic location from which an emergency call has been made.
 - An improved and nationally standardised “Gazetteer”⁴
 - Integrated Command & Control System making full use of the functionality offered by Airwave (the digital radio system)
 - Improved resilience against significant disruptions, such as pandemic flu or malicious attack

19. In addition it is intended to make assessments against a broader range of considerations such as a Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal framework (PESTEL).

Options appraisal

20. There are a number of options that can be identified and then considered. Some initially appear more complex than others but it is important at this stage that the widest possible range is considered and their relative merits evaluated. The options covered in this report are to:

1. Maintain our existing Fire Control room (including the necessary technical upgrade of existing systems) this is the ‘do minimum’ approach
2. Maintain our existing Fire Control room (including the necessary technical upgrade of existing systems) but increase its range of activities to encompass wider organisational areas of responsibility e.g. out of hours Customer Services demands
3. Maintain our existing Fire Control room (including the necessary technical upgrade of existing systems) but integrate in a “virtual control” with other FRSs to enhance resilience and reduce procurement and operating costs

⁴ The Gazetteer is used for locating and sharing incident data with other responders

4. A combination of items 2 and 3 above
 5. Enter a collaboration with other emergency services
 - a. Fire and other emergency services
 - b. Fire / Fire collaboration
 6. Outsource function to a 3rd party.
21. At this early stage much of the detailed information, particularly on the shape of any collaboration and what is involved in achieving it, is either not available or tentative thus the above is simply an indication of the potential options available to Oxfordshire at this time.
22. An initial assessment of the options against the Oxfordshire requirements shows that a collaborative approach with other partners has considerable merits as it has potential to meet requirements identified above.
23. Interoperability and joint working with other Category 1 partners under the CCA 2004 is becoming central to the function of Fire Control rooms. Their actions in operational pre planning and addressing the key risks and intelligence threats identified both Nationally and by the Local Resilience Forum⁵ is part of the wider effectiveness and safety critical aspects mentioned in para 1 above.
24. However, at this stage, none of the above options are considered unacceptable and all will be evaluated.

Current activities

25. In January 2011 Royal Berkshire FRA initiated discussions with a number of other Fire and Rescue Authorities with a view to establishing a collaborative project to identify and deliver a joint Control Room Mobilising and Resource Management facility that included, but was not necessarily limited to the three Fire and Rescue Services in the Thames Valley Area.
26. Subsequently this approach was endorsed by Thames Valley elected Members and their respective Chief Fire Officers against a project mandate document. This and a supporting document are attached as appendix 1 & 2.
27. Discussions and a series of fact finding and scoping meetings have taken place with a view to preparing a Strategic Outline business Case (SOC) that would be made available to Members and the DCLG as part of the lobbying of government to continue to support the replacement of FRS mobilising systems.
28. This process will undertake a full options appraisal approach encompassing the above identified options. Initial work has commenced regarding technical aspects and measuring the options against a PESTEL framework.

⁵ Local Resilience forums are based on Policing areas

29. An initial assessment of a Thames Valley combined FRS approach in relation to the Oxfordshire requirements is considered to have several identifiable benefits that other options are unlikely to meet in full. In particular this relates to co-terminosity and interoperability with our Local Resilience Forum partners under the Civil Contingencies Act.
30. This initial scoping study is being progressed alongside three other Thames Valley FRS collaborative projects which have received Member endorsement. These concern potential for joint arrangements for operational health and safety, fire safety enforcement and aligning of operational officer cover rotas. It is already apparent that future arrangements for Fire Control could significantly enhance such projects.
31. The collaborative approach is considered effective in pooling expertise and reducing individual workloads. All findings will be shared and no commitments have been formally entered into. This approach has perceived benefits by DCLG as indicated in the consultation.
32. In addition this approach links to Oxfordshire County Council Strategic priority of "Efficient Public Services" in that this initial approach, irrespective of final determinations, creates the opportunity to work with others to deliver services more effectively and develops innovative approaches to common issues.
33. Other actions are underway in parallel with the above approach, one of these is an agreement to work with London Fire Brigade in defining requirements for future systems and ensuring future procurement frameworks are accessible, if appropriate, to Oxfordshire and our other potential partners.
34. In undertaking this work it has become apparent that when compared to many other FRAs, this collaborative work is further progressed and more realistic than many comparators. This may have a positive impact on the funding provisions potentially available from DCLG.

Financial and Staff Implications

35. At this stage financial and staff implications of the scoping study are being met from existing resources and this can be sustained to the delivery of the SOC / scoping study which is expected by September 2011.
36. Subject to the SOC / scoping study, if an option is taken forward it will identify the staff and financial implications for both the project initiation and management and the provision of the eventual solution.
37. Dependant upon the methods chosen to meet the options identified there will be both capital and revenue implications. Potential partners have varying availability and approach to capital funding.
38. Oxfordshire have recently been notified of approximately £1M of non ring fenced Capital funding being made available by CLG and further funding is

potentially possible depending on their approach to the consultation responses and the potential schemes being drawn up by FRS's either individually or collectively. Any addition to the capital programme will need to follow the processes defined in the capital strategy.

39. In addition to the above, £0.5M revenue funding has been identified and either earmarked in the 2011/12 budget or placed in OCC Reserve. This has been created in part by early management recognition of the potential cancellation of the original FiReControl project and managerial actions to create planned under spend to meet the project management and initiation costs. These actions have been identified in the monthly monitoring report and subsequent carry forward requests.

Legal Implications

40. As yet there are no direct legal implications but any partnership or outsourcing option will have legal implications which will be considered in the scoping study.

41. Three options have been identified in any collaborative approach:

- Lead Authority
- Joint Board
- Local Authority Controlled Company (as was previously used to manage the FiReControl project and is now being formally wound up)

These have received initial assessment and it is probable that a Joint Board would be the preferred method of providing governance of a new function.

42. It should be noted that there is no ability for a FRA to discharge its statutory obligations contained in the FSA 2004 in relation to call receipt and mobilising by outsourcing or working collaboratively. Therefore it is essential that any chosen option is critically examined so as to ensure that any responsibilities are being discharged effectively. This includes wider legal obligations that OCC may hold, for example it's wider Emergency Planning responsibilities which are in part facilitated by actions undertaken in the current OFRS Control Room.

Equality and inclusion Implications

43. There are no directly identifiable implications in terms of the initial scoping study.

44. There are no directly identifiable implications in relation to eventual service delivery should one of the options being taken forward.

45. There are potential equality implications relating to staff transfers, should one of the options be taken forward. If this were the case a full equality impact assessment would be undertaken in relation to the chosen option.

Risk Management

46. The options appraisal / SOC will undertake a risk assessment as an integral element. Enhancing resilience and reducing risks associated with spate conditions are considered central to the identification and adoption of the preferred option.
47. There are identifiable risks in the delivery of any project and these are compounded by the complexity of any collaborative working arrangements. As yet there are no defined protocols for managing these risks but it is jointly recognised that strong, effective and timely project governance will be required.
48. Project risks will be further managed in Oxfordshire by the use of OCC project management protocols with the project reporting formally to the Change Management Board.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:-

- (a) Endorse the progression of the collaborative scoping study and creation of the Strategic Outline Business Case being undertaken by Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Royal Berkshire FRSS
- (b) Approve the above list (para 18) of Oxfordshire requirements as benchmarks against which future options will be assessed
- (c) Approve the list of options (para 20) included within the options appraisal
- (d) Require the CFO to instigate appropriate actions in relation to the asset management and capital strategy dependant on the outcomes of the scoping study
- (e) Require the CFO to report back to the Cabinet Member on a regular basis covering:-
 - the CLG consultation response
 - progress on the scoping study and strategic outline business case
 - progress on other third party activities

Colin Thomas

Deputy Chief Fire Officer

Contact Officer: Colin Thomas – 01865 855206

May 2011