

## ***SELECT COMMITTEE SLAMS REGIONAL CONTROLS***

Government plans to create 9 Regional Fire Controls in England have been heavily criticised by a House of Commons Select Committee which investigated the progress of the project so far. Its report has slammed the project as a “***catalogue of poor judgement and mismanagement***” and says that “***there are now considerable doubts about whether the project can be delivered***”.

The cross party committee for Communities and Local Government (CLG), which recently took evidence from ministers and civil servants as well as fire service specialists, says that the project “***has been inadequately planned, poorly executed and badly managed***” and exposes the waste of taxpayers money in a project where “***costs have escalated and projected savings plummeted.***”

Under the controversial plans, all seven Emergency Fire Control rooms in the South West would be closed and replaced with a single “Regional” Control Centre (RCC) in Taunton. The project, which has been consistently and vehemently opposed by the FBU, has been a catalogue of disasters from the start with never ending delays, massively increasing costs and with the Government and their IT contractor blaming each other for failing to deliver necessary technology.

### **Astronomical cost to taxpayers**

The cost to the taxpayer is astronomical with CLG confirming that the monthly cost of maintaining the South West RCC in Taunton is £140,783. This equates to a running cost of £4,692 a day for a building that has been standing largely empty and unused for over two years. This is at a time when many FRS’s in the Region are looking at major cuts because of a lack of cash.

### **Union demands that Project is scrapped**

Despite exposing the massive failings of the project, the Select Committee pulls back from demanding its immediate cancellation but does say that it should only proceed if a number of conditions are met, particularly that there are no further delays. Importantly however, the Select Committee also tells the Government to urgently draw up contingency plans, including the upgrading of existing Fire Control rooms, in anticipation of further failures.

This option of upgrading existing Fire Controls has the full support of the FBU and is the best way of ensuring that the Fire Service remains resilient and is able to mobilise with greater speed, responsiveness and effectiveness.



**Empty Interior of RCC**

The FBU has cited the report as further evidence to support demands that the project is scrapped immediately and that existing Controls be upgraded as a matter of priority.



The South West RCC

The CLG select committee had previously looked into the issue of the FiRe Control project and as such the recent report was based on a short inquiry with narrow terms of reference. Despite this a number of Fire Services, stakeholders and of course the Fire Brigades Union made written submissions to be considered by the committee.

### **FBU Evidence Heavily Quoted**

The Unions evidence is heavily quoted throughout the report and has clearly made a major impact on the findings of the select committee. The FBU was also called to give verbal evidence to the committee and the General Secretary attended the committee and presented the views of the FBU to the committee members in person.

### **Terms of Reference**

The terms of reference for this report were:

- progress with the project so far;
- the reasons for the cost and time overruns that the project has experienced;
- and what, if any, changes need to be made to the Government's plans for proceeding with the project.

Following the written and verbal evidence, the select committee published its report on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010. It runs to over 50 pages but its conclusions and recommendations run to seven paragraphs.

These conclusions and recommendations are reproduced in full below:

### **House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee:**

#### ***Fire Control: Fifth Report of Session 2009-10***

#### **Chapter 8 Conclusions and Recommendations**

*98. In May 2009 the Public Accounts Committee criticised CLG for poor performance in contracting and managing the New Dimension project. CLG responded by asserting that it had learnt lessons and was improving its delivery, citing the Fire Control project.*

*Our inquiry shows that this is not the case.*

*99. The Fire Control project has been inadequately planned, poorly executed, and badly managed. The original contract was ill-suited to the nature of the project. Relationships both with the major stakeholders and with contractual partners have been mishandled.*

*High staff turnover in CLG, especially at a senior level, has compromised the Department's ability to manage the project effectively. Costs have escalated and projected savings plummeted. The history of the project is a catalogue of poor judgement and mismanagement.*

*100. There are now considerable doubts about whether the project can be delivered.*

**Chapter 8 Conclusions and Recommendations cont:**

CLG needs to take this opportunity to consider carefully the points and concerns raised in this Report to review its options and make an informed, clear, open decision about the future of Fire Control.

101. On balance, given the investment of public funds already committed, and the benefits that will accrue, we conclude that CLG should press ahead with the Fire Control project.

However, this recommendation is conditional on the assumption that CLG addresses the significant concerns and issues raised in this Report relating to its project management and the relationship with its main contractor and with its stakeholders.

In particular, it is conditional on the urgent agreement of a viable project plan, in which the main stakeholders can have confidence, which will ensure that the target 'go-live' date of mid-2011 will be met.

This project plan must include interim milestones which will allow progress to be assessed on a regular basis and decisions to be taken about whether alternatives need to be considered.

102. CLG should also put in place a communications plan that aims to shift the negative perception of the project and to influence FRAs to make the positive decision to switch to the system.

Each FRA has the legal right to make the final decision on whether to accept Fire Control.

CLG must respect that right and must work hard to unite all FRAs in supporting Fire Control.

Any failure to ensure that all FRAs use the new system would be a significant blow to the ultimate aims of the project.

103. Meanwhile, CLG should urgently draw up and consult on contingency plans for any further failures.

As a priority, those contingency plans should ensure ongoing safe and effective fire and rescue cover across the whole country whether or not Fire Control is implemented.

They must also ensure that all regions involved will have adequate fire and safety measures in place during the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The plans should include provision for the maintenance and, where necessary, upgrading of existing control room technology, and CLG should meet the full costs of that to FRAs where it has become necessary as a result of delays in the Fire Control project.

104. We recommend that CLG inform our successors in the new Parliament in July 2010 that a viable project plan has been agreed with EADS, and report on progress against that plan, in particular the early version of the modified Intergraph product



# ***Scrap this Scandalous waste of Public Money NOW!***



## **SOUTH WEST FBU DEMANDS THAT REGIONAL FIRE CONTROL FARCE IS SCRAPPED NOW!**

The FBU in the South West has demanded that Politicians start listening to the Professional voice of the Fire Service and scrap the Regional Control project. Following the publication of the Select Committee Report Tam McFarlane Executive Council Member for the Region said: "The Government plans for regional

fire control rooms go from one disaster to another and must rate as one of the worst Government IT projects ever. This is a scandalous waste of public money at a time when Fire Brigades are looking at cuts because of a lack of cash. What was meant to be a money saving project has turned into a financial disaster and diverted funds away from frontline services.

"The select committee report exposes the incompetence at the heart of this project which is ill-conceived, badly-managed, badly-planned, over-budget and all of the blame lies with the Department for Communities and Local Government. The Select Committee had the evidence but lacked the courage to conclude that the project should be abandoned now. To carry on - as they suggest - is like re-arranging the deckchairs on the Titanic."

***"We will make this a General Election issue"***

"It is never too late to stop making a mistake; it's never too late to stop wasting public money. The project needs to be stopped now before it gets even worse. I urge all Members to make sure that this is an issue in the forthcoming General Election. We will all soon have Politicians on our doorstep wanting our vote. We have to make sure that they are clear: if they want our vote they will have to support our Service. That means that they must commit to scrapping this hugely damaging RCC project and use the money to invest where it is needed: the front line of our Service! If the Government doesn't act before the election then we will be demanding that the forthcoming new Government takes a new broom to this disaster and puts it into the political dustbin where it belongs"

Simon Jones, FBU Regional CSNC Rep said "As this whole fiasco is unravelling in front of the eyes of Ministers it is Control Room staff who will be left to pick up the pieces whatever the final outcome. Our members are dedicated professionals who have been used as a political football by Minister after Minister; this entire project has been a case study in how not to run a major project in the public sector. If the Government had listened to the FBU at the outset then we would not be in this mess now. There is only one way to go now and that is to scrap this white elephant before another penny is wasted."