

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

EMBARGO: 00.01 on 1 April 2010

SELECT COMMITTEE REPORT SHOWS FIRECONTROL PROJECT SHOULD BE ABANDONED

The Government cannot meet the Select Committee's six conditions for continuing with FireControl, says Fire Brigades Union general secretary Matt Wrack.

Mr Wrack said today (31 March):

"The Select Committee Report on the government's FireControl project supports our long-held view that public money is being wasted and public safety compromised. The Select Committee sets out six conditions for the continuance of the project, and in our view these conditions cannot be met, so the project must be abandoned. We recognise that this will mean that public money has been wasted, but to continue with the project means throwing good money after bad.

"The Select Committee's view that "the project has been beset by a lack of openness and collaboration with the main stakeholders from the start" bears out our own experience. Firefighters, who are surely the key stakeholders, have not been consulted, and when they have nonetheless offered their opinion, it has routinely been ignored. Politicians with no knowledge or experience have taken technical decisions which they were not competent to take, and have not bothered to ask those who know.

"It is shocking, but not surprising, that the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) did not allow the Select Committee to see the independent reviews of its management of the project—even in confidence. We agree with the Select Committee that "this lack of openness... implies a certain insecurity about its handling of the FireControl project to date."

"The Select Committee sets out, sensibly and soberly, six conditions for continuing with the project. At least three of them cannot be met:

"Consulting fully with Fire and Rescue staff and professionals in defining end-user requirements;"

"Taking further steps to shift the negative perception of the project and to influence fire and rescue authorities to make the positive decision to switch to the new system;" and

"Providing assurances that the safety and security of the Olympic Games will not be compromised during the roll-out of the new Regional Control Centres."

"Too many mistakes have been made already for these conditions to be met. Even if the government were to start consulting today with fire control professionals, it has already taken too many decisions in ignorance of their effect on the service. Negative perceptions of the project are now indelible, and the project itself mired in poor decisions. No credible guarantee can be offered about whether the safety and security of the Olympic Games will be compromised. If the new Regional Control Centres are not fully operational, it will be compromised, and Ministers promising otherwise are making pledges which they do not know they can keep.

"The FBU and anyone else with any understanding of this project knows that there WILL be further delays, just as there have been delays throughout the history of the project. Pressing on regardless of this fact will increase the risk within the fire service since a number of local controls need to be modernised and this process has been held back because of undelivered and undeliverable promises from the government."

Contact:- Francis Beckett 07813 001372

020 8349 9194