

FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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DITCH FiReCONTROL NOW – OR RISK MOUNTING COSTS AND EMBARRASMENT, COALITION MINISTERS WARNED

The Coalition government stands accused of betraying its own principles by failing to act swiftly to scrap FiReControl, the controversial project to replace 46 local control centres with nine huge Regional Control Centres.

The Coalition government “can’t pass the buck” by continuing to support a project which is running way behind schedule, costs have rocketed from £120m to £420m and is plagued by problems with IT systems, Ian Watkins, regional FBU chair for Yorkshire and Humberside warned.

“Coalition politicians have already reneged on pre-election pledges to scrap the scheme. Costs are spiralling, buildings remain empty and IT systems are not up to scratch. This turkey of a project risks becoming an albatross round the Coalition’s neck unless they move to scrap it as soon as possible“, said Mr Watkins.

Fire chiefs are already trawling for redundancies in advance of next month’s Comprehensive Spending Review which is expected to lead to swingeing cuts across government departments, as the government ushers in a new “Age of Austerity”.

“FiReControl flies in the face of both ‘Localism’ and ‘Value for Money’, which Ministers are always saying underpins their policies” said Mr Watkins. “The Coalition government is prepared to ditch ID Cards, the Audit Commission and even the schools’ buildings programme on the grounds of cost – but it’s still funding FiReControl. It’s their call to scrap it – they can’t pass the buck“. Empty Regional Control Centre buildings are costing over a £1million a month in rent, according to CLG figures.

North Yorkshire’s Chief Fire Officer has already asked for “expressions of interest” in voluntary redundancy, in a mail shot straight to staff, says Ian Watkins. “The public will start to ask questions about why public funds are being used on this wasteful project, while frontline firefighters and experienced control staff face losing their jobs. The contrast between getting rid of firefighters and pumping money into FiReControl will not be lost on people”.

The FBU warned that the FiReControl project was deeply flawed when it was unveiled by the Labour government in 2004. Others, including parliamentary select committees, have since become disillusioned with the project. Fire minister Bob Neill acknowledged FiReControl was “over-budget and behind schedule” in the summer. At a select committee hearing earlier this week Eric Pickles, Minister for Communities and Local Government, criticised EADS, the IT company behind the FiReControl IT system. The computer system could not direct vehicles across vast swathes of the country, an exasperated Mr Pickles told MPS.

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