

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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Stop squandering taxpayers' money, honour pre-election pledge and scrap FiReControl now – FBU challenges Tories to stop dithering.

Tory ministers in the Coalition government were today challenged to call time on the flawed and costly plan to regionalise fire control in England.

Since the last General Election the botched and wasteful FiReControl project has cost the tax payer £6.5M just for rent on empty buildings.

In the run-up to the election, both the Tories – holding their party conference in Birmingham this week - and the Lib-Dems pledged to scrap FiReControl, the project which aims to replace 46 local fire control centres with nine big new centres covering the whole country.

The ill-fated FiReControl Project has been plagued by IT delays, contractual problems and missed deadlines. No computers have been installed, and the project is already £300M over budget. It was branded “a complete disaster area” by Clive Betts, chair of the Communities Select Committee a few months ago.

The main contractor EADS came under fire at the committee.

The focus is now on Tory and Liberal Democrat MPs who opposed the project before the election. The FBU challenges them to deliver on their promises to scrap FiReControl now they are in power.

Eric Pickles, Minister for Communities and Local Government, told the Communities committee that a system designed to navigate appliances to fires or floods could not do so over huge swathes of the country.

Clearly exasperated, he criticised EADS, FiReControl's main contractor, for failing to meet deadlines, or even co-operate with a departmental team drafted in to help sort on-going problems. He promised a decision would be taken soon on FiReControl's future – yet costs continue to mount. * SEE ATTACHMENT
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The FBU has consistently criticised FiReControl, calling for more investment in existing centres. A project relying on untested technology to replace control staff's knowledge, experience and intelligence risks compromising public safety. Continued support for the project flies in the face of the “Localism” and “Value for Money” philosophy that the Coalition claims underpin its policies.

Sharon Riley, FBU Executive Council Member representing control staff, called for a swift decision to ditch FiReControl, which was sapping both resources and morale in the service. “We know that in the current economic climate every penny counts. Everyone's having to do their bit, tighten their belts and make savings to pay for a situation which was not of our making.

“The Government should scrap this project now, saving the tax payer millions, and invest in existing fire controls across England. “

Missed deadlines and huge overspend apart, the thinking behind FiReControl is deeply flawed. The public should be aware of what the FiReControl Project would mean for them, says Sharon Riley. “Instead of relying on experienced local

fire fighter control staff, calls could be answered hundreds of miles away. The South West Regional Control Centre is in Taunton, for instance - so if you live in Truro and phone 999, you will be put through to Somerset. However, the Project relies on a network of 9 RCCs. If your regional control centre is busy your call will be put through to any available operator on the network at any of the other RCCs anywhere in the country. So in Truro, your call could be answered in Newcastle”.

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