

Project Update January 2006

FIRE REGIONAL RESILIENCE NETWORK TAKES SHAPE

“Public safety is our priority. This project is about creating an integrated system of regional control centres, using the best available technology, which will make the service more resilient, more effective, and better able to protect firefighters and the public.”

Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Fire Minister at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Building on detailed consultation, planning and design work, and the location announcements made in 2005, the FiReControl project continues to make progress and to take shape. This Update covers some of the key project developments over the next two months.

Safeguarding communities with the right resources at the right time

Together with the Firelink project, FiReControl is central to the fire modernisation programme and will deliver an integrated national network of regional control centres in England.

FiReControl builds on the professional skills and knowledge of Fire and Rescue services experienced in managing risk and handling emergency operations ranging from small house fires to major incidents such as the Buncefield Fuel Fire last December (see below).

Safeguarding communities and protecting the public are clear priorities for government and the fire and rescue service working in partnership. With the challenges and risks of an uncertain world, the Government’s investment in FiReControl reflects the vital importance of:

- ***Improved resilience*** - *creating and maintaining critical national infrastructure. The new regional fire control centres will provide a consistent, co-ordinated and integrated response network with the capacity to deal with major incidents from natural disasters to terrorist attack.*

- **Best technology** - *FiReControl will make the best of the latest proven and life-saving technology available to ALL control centres, incorporating key benefits in caller identification, use of appliances, GIS mapping system, route planning and risk information for firefighters.*
- **Most efficient use of resources** - *Investment in front line services complements achievements in prevention and risk reduction and helps to save more lives.*

Responding to the challenges of “the largest fire in Europe since World War II”

The need to safeguard communities and to provide an effective, integrated response to major, complex incidents was again demonstrated in December with the Buncefield Fuel Depot explosion and fire in Hertfordshire.

During the fire, the largest fire in Europe since World War II, appliances were mobilised from as far afield as North Yorkshire and Somerset. This was coordinated by the Interim National Coordination Centre. For the future, following full implementation of the FiReControl project, the new regional control centres will provide this mobilisation function direct.

The fire at Buncefield was finally extinguished after 60 hours of continuous firefighting. The response and recovery have required extensive local, regional and national coordination and support, based on well-rehearsed and tested plans and including the use of specialist equipment such as high volume pumps supplied by the New Dimension programme.

Launch of high profile recruitment campaign for first Regional Control Centre Director

FiReControl is a major, fast-moving, mission-critical project and one of the first of the innovative regional control centres will cover the East Midlands. The beginning of February sees the launch of a recruitment campaign for the regional control centre Director of this “vanguard” area.

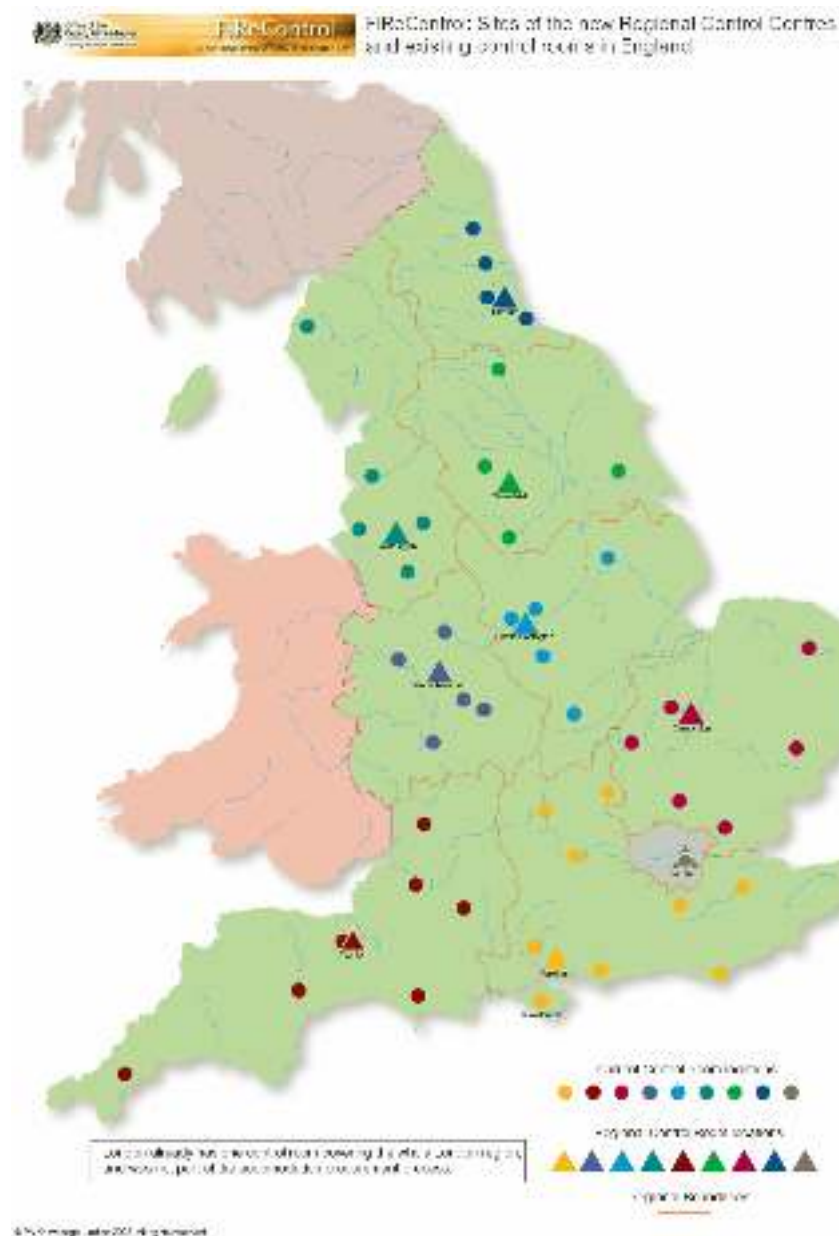
Advertised in national and fire press, the post calls for a professional and dynamic leader who possesses significant senior management experience.

Initial work will involve assisting the national project team with operational strategy, processes and procedures for all control centres. This will be followed by involvement in the start up of the East Midlands control centre itself, which is to be based at Willow Farm Business Park, Castle Donington. As the control centre becomes operational, there will be full responsibility for managing the delivery of control room services across the region and beyond – a role which is as varied as it is challenging.

Ground-breaking ceremony in the North East as regional control centre plans move towards reality

Following the announcement in 2005 of the locations for eight regional control centres for the fire and rescue service (outside London), the intensive research and planning moves closer to reality with planning permission being granted for seven of the eight centres, and, soon to take place, the first “ground-breaking” ceremony to mark the start of construction work.

On 9 February, Jim Fitzpatrick MP, Fire Minister at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, will attend the ground-breaking event for the North East regional control centre at Belmont Business Park on the outskirts of Durham city. The Minister will be joined by Chair of the Regional Management Board, the Regional Project Director, Fire Authority Chairs and Chief Fire Officers.



As well as ensuring new standards of operational response, the new regional control centres, will provide staff with high-quality, secure and attractive places to work with buildings designed to fit in with local surroundings and which exceed environmental and health and safety standards. Control room staff from across the country, at all levels, have contributed to the design process by making clear what is important to them.

ODPM funding to support the change process

National funding will be made available to coordinate Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) change activities from 1 April 2006 until the end of the FiReControl implementation period for each region. This new money will ensure that no FRA suffers any financial disadvantage as a result of the extra work required to deliver the new control rooms in their region.

Under the 'new burdens' agreement, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) will be providing almost £3m in 2006/07 to support staff work in Fire and Rescue Authorities on the FiReControl project. New burdens funding has been provided since the project began. This tranche includes funding for a full-time co-ordinator in each fire and rescue service, who will ensure that the project is rolled out at local level integrally linked with the Firelink project.

More detailed information regarding implementation funding for the Firelink and FiReControl projects is set out in a new Fire and Rescue Services Circular issued on 19 December 2005. (Fire Projects Implementation Funding for 2006-07 and 2007-08 Circular No 63-2005).

Integration of national organisation joins up key responsibilities

The creation of an integrated **Fire and Resilience Directorate (FRD)** in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister signals a new phase in achieving fire modernisation and joining up key responsibilities at national level.

Under the the leadership of Alun Evans, Director of Fire and Resilience, the new Directorate's core aims are to:

- Transform the way the fire and rescue service works;
- Develop a more flexible response focused on high risk so as to save more lives;
- Respond better to future threats such as demographic shifts, global threats and climate change;
- Build a capacity at a regional and local level through better engagement with our partners; and

- Strengthen the country's resilience in partnership with others and by continuing to roll out our major resilience programmes such as FiReControl and Firelink.

The integration of ODPM's resilience and fire responsibilities demonstrates the ODPM's commitment to a more joined up relationship with its stakeholders including the Fire and Rescue Service, the Chief Fire Officers Association (CFOA), the Local Government Association (LGA) and the unions.

A programme of regional briefings for elected members of FRAs is being arranged during February and March in conjunction with the LGA and CFOA.

"The London bombings last year proved the value of a regional control centre. It was possible to deal with a series of major incidents safeguarding the public and firefighters who are entitled to expect such professional protection from staff who are operating the best equipment available in a safe environment."

Sir Graham Meldrum, HM Chief Inspector of Fire Services