

## Statement by Shahid Malik, Fire Minister

### FiReControl project - progress

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I would like to inform the House about progress on the FiReControl project - part of our major programme of work to ensure that the Fire and Rescue Service is fully equipped to meet the challenges and demands of the modern world.

Recent events, in both Camberwell and Edinburgh, have reinforced the very real significance of doing all that we can to ensure the safety of the public and fire-fighters. FiReControl will provide the public and fire-fighters with very substantial safety benefits by establishing, for the first time, a linked national network of nine regional fire control centres across England. These will replace the current 46 stand-alone control rooms, operated in each Fire and Rescue Authority (FRA) area.

On a day-to-day basis, the new system will improve firefighter safety, the management of incidents and both the efficiency and responsiveness of the service. Fire-fighters will have access to safety information and incident details through mobile data terminals, and satellite navigation and automatic tracking of fire appliances will enable more efficient use of resources. Emergency calls from the public will be automatically located and managed using spatial data right down to property-level. Control rooms will share calls across the network to manage even the highest call volumes and thereby be more resilient in emergencies. The new network will also improve the country's ability to respond to terrorism, large-scale industrial accidents and natural disasters such as flooding.

FiReControl is a complex and demanding project that involves significant change to operating practices in the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) as well as the development and installation of a major new national IT system. In November 2008 my predecessor informed the House that the project was being rescheduled due to slower than expected progress with development of the new IT, and that we would continue to monitor progress carefully as there could only be certainty on final timings once we had made progress through the earlier stages.

Good progress is being made on the building of the nine regional centres and the setting up of the local authority controlled companies that will manage the centres. The delivery and installation of equipment in

local fire stations is also on track. However, in recent months it has become clear that technical problems with developing the IT system in a way which will meet all our and FRS requirements mean that further time is needed to complete the project.

I am proposing therefore to extend the delivery schedule by ten months. This means that the first FRSs will switch over to the Regional Control Centres in spring 2011 and the last will switch over by the end of 2012. We have discussed this in detail with the representatives of FRSs and local government, and we believe that this is a realistic timetable. Key Olympic authorities will switch over in time to prepare for the Games, and the network will provide robust fall-back arrangements for all FRSs over the Olympic period. I am today publishing a full revised schedule for switch over of all FRSs in all regions and copies will be placed in the Library of the House.

To ensure consistent progress on this revised timescale, we have agreed with EADS, our main supplier, and with key stakeholders, a new approach to delivery to give greater assurance on short-term milestones and closer engagement with FRSs.

We remain committed to meeting all the upfront costs associated with the project and to the principle that no FRA will bear any additional cost as a result of FiReControl implementation. Once the new network is established, many FRAs are expected to make savings. These can be reinvested in local priorities and frontline services. We will be updating the cost figures contained in the FiReControl Business Case in due course to reflect today's rescheduling.

FiReControl continues to form an important part of the Fire and Resilience Programme, which has already delivered very substantial benefits for the FRS. The New Dimensions Project has given the FRS new vehicles, equipment, and training to respond to terrorism and natural disasters. The Firelink Project is delivering new digital communications technology, which is giving the FRS access to a world-class communications system. FiReControl will build on this successful delivery.