

Q&A from Elected Members Seminars

Below is a consolidated list of the questions and answers from the joint members seminars held so far in 2006. They included;

East Midlands (EM) Seminar held on the 19th May 2006.

South West (SW) Seminar held on the 24th May 2006.

North East (NE) Seminar held on the 7th June 2006.

Further seminars are planned in the other regions for later this year.

FiReControl

Q. Can FRS have the assurance that they do not have to apply quickest and nearest resources? (EM)

FRAs will continue to decide on the most appropriate response through their Integrated Risk Management Plan.

Q. Will the system mobilise the nearest available resource? (SW)

It will mobilise the nearest appropriate resource. Restrictions on how assets can be mobilised will be for FRAs to determine. The system is designed to ensure that Pre Determined Attendances as laid out in local IRMPs can be followed.

Q. Given the previous response has the need for skilled staff such as statisticians, to deal with out of scope activity, been considered? (NE)

Yes and the ongoing work to clarify out of scope activity will provide further information to feed the Business Case. The requirements for the Infrastructure Services contract include the need to generate statistical information for RCC, DCLG and the FRS.

Q. Concern has been expressed at the RMB about Director's liabilities. What protection is proposed to ensure that Directors aren't liable for corporate manslaughter from a death traced back to an error in the RCC? (NE)

As this is a specialist area it is probably appropriate that a suitable written response will be provided following consultation with our legal advisors.

Q. Do FRS's use different call signs, incident types, names, etc? (SW)

Yes all FRSs have their own methods in almost all aspects of their work. For example, we looked at the incident types from 10 FRSs and came away with 1046 different call signs. Less than 100 that were used in more than 1 FRS. (An FRS typically has 80 - 200 incident types).

We have had to design 80 convergence items that define common terminology and ways of working across all English FRSs to enable the control rooms to work. This does not include the incident ground or equipment differences that also exist.

IT suppliers? Will the Department underwrite the system in event of failure? (SW)

The supplier will be contractually obliged to support the system for the full term of the contract (as opposed to an arrangement where support must be renewed periodically). Contractual protection will be built-in to ensure that it is possible to continue support if the supplier ceases trading.

It is not clear what is meant by the Department underwriting the system. There will be obligations on the supplier to successfully deliver the system and keep it running, with financial and other remedies in case of failure.

Q. Phil Woolas said to the Select Committee that we would need to see the IT supplier's prices before deciding whether to go forward with the project. Is the future of the project in doubt? (SW)

No. The Minister was being prudent. We have been talking to the bidders for some time and have a good idea of the prices they might submit. We have done a lot of work, some of it employing outside experts, to estimate what the IT should cost. But until we receive binding offers it is impossible to be certain about the costs of the IT. If the costs were significantly above what we expect then clearly Ministers would want to consider whether to proceed.

Q. It would be unreasonable for the RCCs to commit to performance standards, when it will have no direct relationship with the IT supplier. What will be the relationship between the RCC and DCLG who will hold the contract with the IT supplier? (SW)

Many of the most important areas affecting performance standards will be under the direct control of RCCs, such as staffing levels and staff management. It is therefore reasonable for RCCs to carry responsibility for performance of the services, subject to the IT systems performing to their required service levels.

Q. Is there a plan for transition – the roll out, testing, training and staffing aspects of cutover? (SW)

A draft approach to transition has been developed and this is currently being presented to the regional teams to validate our thinking. This approach integrates the rollout, testing, training and staffing aspects of cutover.

In addition, a high level plan has been developed in line with this approach. This has been developed using a set of planning assumptions. The approach and the high level plan will continue to be developed and further details added. There are a wide range of future inputs that will need to be taken on board as the project progresses, including:

- the successful Infrastructure Services supplier's solution and their timescales for delivery
- further refinement of our planning assumptions, incorporating feedback from regional and FRS impact analysis responses
- regional and FRS plans for their own preparations and implementation
- further work on clarifying and refining the approach to align RCC transition staffing requirements with grouping of FRSS into batches for testing and cutover.

Q. When will the system go live? (SW)

We aim for transition to take place over 2008 and 2009.

Q. How many calls do you expect RCCs to handle which will come from outside their region? (SW)

Most calls will come from within their own region. Only in exceptional periods will be they receiving calls from or passing calls to other regional control centres. We are considering the financial implications of cross border mobilisation. The Finance Working Group favour some form of charging which disincentives FRAs from routinely “exporting” attendance at incidents to other FRAs.

RCC Buildings

Q. What is the period of the Lease agreement? (EM)

The lease period for the East Midlands is 25 years.

Q. Will the RCC provide facilities for administration staff and Company Directors facilitation i.e. offices and a room for Board meetings? (EM)

Yes

Q. The RCC buildings seem very large and we understand this is partly for resilience reasons. Will DCLG reimburse FRAs for the additional lease costs they will incur? (SW)

DCLG will look at the overall costs of the new system compared with the costs of the present arrangements. If the overall costs are greater DCLG will meet the costs. We will not be looking at the costs of individual elements to determine whether they are more or less than at present.

Q. Why have you built the SW RCC (and three others) on a floodplain? (SW)

The South West region RCC is not being built on a flood plain. As part of the accommodation evaluation process, the likelihood of flooding of both the site and the access to the site were evaluated by ODPM's professional advisors. It was found to be satisfactory and the site has been through the planning process (including involvement from the Environment Agency) and has received planning consent. Even if flooding did occur, measures have been included in the design of both the building and the wider site to ensure that the facility is not affected.

Q. Has a risk assessment for the new RCC been carried out? (SW)

The whole process of selecting the appropriate location for each RCC was based on mitigating risk. We have, of course, carried out rigorous assessments of possible threats to the building. Each building will have to pass stringent tests before a Regional Control Centre goes live.

We have built the following safety features into the designs for each building:

- multiple fuel generator tanks
- external fuel filling point
- gaseous fire suppression in critical areas of the building
- UPS provision via dual battery rooms
- multiple security zones with access control
- separate security lodge away from main building.

The RCCs will be protected by secure perimeter fencing, controlled access to both the building and the site and continuous monitoring by camera and security staff.

Finally, in the unlikely event of one or more centres being out of action for whatever reason, calls for that centre will automatically be routed to other centres, meaning that 999 fire calls can still be answered.

HR Issues

Q. Who is going to manage Representative Body engagement with Local Authority controlled companies? (EM)

Which body if any is up to the company to decide. Guidance will be issued nationally. Could be National Joint Council for FRS but could be handled locally.

Q. TUPE: does it apply and who makes redundancies? (EM)

TUPE does apply. The guidance from the national project is likely to be that FRAs rather than the company should make redundancies as this is expected to be better for staff. Final decisions on this issue are a matter for FRAs.

Q. Who will make staff redundant if that is unavoidable? (SW)

Every effort should be made to avoid redundancy among control room staff. If staff have to be made redundant, DCLG's strong preference would be for this to be done by their existing employers – the FRAs. They will know the staff, and should be better placed to offer them advice on career options and may be able to find them another job if they did not move to the RCC. But the decision is ultimately for the FRAs and the RCCs to reach.

Q. Who will meet the costs of redundancy, re-training, redeployment and relocation that might arise as a result of the introduction of FireControl? (SW)

Guidance on this issue can be found on the DCLG web site under FRS Circular 63/2005 Fire Projects Implementation Funding for 06-07 and 07-08.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1124644>

Q. There was debate on which representative body would the company have to engage with in terms of staff representative body engagement. (EM)

Depends on the balance in terms of membership of people “TUPEd” across to new joiners and there being a percentage majority of existing membership.

Q. How will consultation with the TUs be handled – at a local or at NJC level? (SW)

The national project will be issuing guidance on consultation obligations based on legal counsel being taken from employment lawyers advising DCLG. It is likely that all formal collective consultation will take place at local levels.

Q. How do Pensions schemes and TUPE relate? (EM)

Pensions do not have to be transferred under TUPE but there needs to be an equivalent pension scheme.

Q. Will staff be able to apply for RCC jobs outside their region? (SW)

Staff will be eligible to apply for RCC jobs outside their region where there are vacancies (e.g. in the case of control room operators, where there are less staff for which it is reasonable for them to transfer under TUPE than there are roles). TUPE will apply for transfer to jobs within the region and they will move to the new location so long as it is reasonable for them to do so. Staff will be able to apply for jobs outside their region –

but posts in another region will be filled where possible from TUPE transferees from within that region.

Q. How many staff do you expect there to be in the new RCC?

Between 100 and 130, but the final number will be for the new company to determine.

Q. Why haven't staffing figures been provided to the region? (NE)

A presentation to each region was made last year and regional teams were given indicative staffing numbers. It was explained that these numbers would need to be revisited once the IS contract was signed. Caution was advised about publishing these figures as this could be interpreted as the start of consultation with staff.

Q. At the moment control staff work in a uniformed, disciplined service won't standards drop if they work for a private company in a call centre? (NE)

The staff will **not** work either in a call centre or for a private company. The RCC will belong to a local authority company which will be wholly owned by the fire authorities. There is no suggestion that control staff will be de-skilled to operate in the RCC.

Q. What will happen to the pension rights of the control staff? (NE)

The Cabinet Office Statement of Practice makes it clear that the pension provision of staff will be protected and staff will have access to a comparable scheme.

Q. Will extra resources be provided to FRS to cope with the extra HR Workload which will be required? (NE)

Extra funding has been agreed to provide short term HR Support to assist with the HR Issues that will be involved in setting up the LAC. Extra funding to assist with FRS workloads will be considered through the New Burdens process. Each FRS was free to use the New Burdens funding they have already received as they saw fit, including for HR support.

Q. Why are we establishing a LAC rather than allowing the RMB to be the employer? (NE)

Under constitutional arrangements the RMB cannot employ staff. Consultation on models of governance was undertaken last year and the majority of regions chose the LAC as the preferred approach.

Q. It appears that Control staff will no longer be part of the FRS. If that is true I don't think they will be happy about it? Do they know as this is the first I have heard of this? (NE)

Control staff will continue to be part of the FRS, performing a vital service to the public. The issue of who will be the employer has been communicated on numerous occasions and that specific question features in the Question and Answer guide on the website. It is covered again in the next newsletter.

Q. How will sick absence be managed both before and after "go live"? Has likely increased absence levels been factored into transition plans? (SW)

Regional HR groups are being encouraged by the national project to ensure that effective performance management processes are in place in the run up to go-live, which will include ensuring good managerial practices in managing absence. Subsequent to go-live, the RCCs will be accountable for ensuring that there are

appropriate and effective processes in place. It is recognised that the transition period may be an unsettling time and as such the national project team will be working with regional project teams and HR practitioners to ensure that this period is effectively planned, that staff are well communicated with and that individuals are well-supervised and supported by line management.

Q. How robust are the staff numbers quoted? How have you taken into account the work that currently goes on in control rooms but will not be carried out in the new RCCs? In Devon for example there is speculation that we may need to set up a new 7x24 facility to handle the out of scope activities currently done in the control room. (SW)

The numbers are our best estimates of the staff required to run the RCC, taking into account the likely technology solution and new ways of working. The business case takes into account work that is currently done in control rooms that will not be done in RCCs. Work that requires 7x24 will be carried out by the RCC. We would not expect FRAs to have to provide a 7x24 facility to do the work that is 'out of scope' for the RCC.

Costs and Savings

Q. Do the £20 million annual savings take into account the £160 million implementation cost? (EM)

No. £20 million is an annual saving in running costs. In terms of the FiReControl business case, these savings will be offset against implementation costs. However, FRAs will make all the savings. DCLG will pay all the implementation costs.

Q. How will the new system deliver savings? (SW)

Savings arise from the greater efficiency of the RCCs. In particular the new technology/ways of working will enable them to employ fewer staff than at present.

Q. Will there be a redistribution of savings? (SW)

Savings from the introduction of the system are likely to fall unevenly (depending size and efficiency of current operations). The Finance Working Group is considering mechanisms for redistributing costs.

Q. Can the savings made contribute to Local Government Gershon Targets on savings? (EM)

The published Outline Business Case compared forecast costs for regional controls with the costs of running the service before any Gershon savings had been factored in. The Full Business Case will be informed by the latest historical/projected running costs.

Q. Sometime in the future is there going to be a macroeconomic picture showing comparative data between the nine regional RCCs as opposed to 46 individual FRS showing how much all of the project costs are if the regions are getting value for money? (EM)

The Outline Business Case was published last year including assumptions regarding the accommodation procurement and infrastructure services contract. The accommodation costs are now known and the missing component remains that of the Infrastructure Services contract. The intention will be to publish the final Business Case when all cost details are known.

Q. When do regions start paying for the RCC, after each FRS has cut-over or after all of the FRS have cut-over? (NE)

After the last FRS in a region has cut-over.

Q. Have the costs involved with providing the out of scope work been considered in any gross savings? (NE)

Yes and a further piece of work is currently on-going with out of scope which will improve the quality of the information gathered to date.

Q. Isn't this all going to cost more? New initiatives generally do. (NE)

The Outline Business Case has identified potential savings in areas such as staff numbers. Given the RCC will be dealing with larger areas and greater call volumes than FRS Controls there is more scope to balance the staffing numbers against call volumes. Sufficient staff are included in the proposed staffing numbers to deal with major incidents, spate conditions and fallback conditions. The support of a national network ensures large call volumes can be handled more efficiently than current arrangements. Administrative duties will not be undertaken by highly skilled and highly paid Control staff which helps realise further savings.

Q. What would DCLG's position be if this new work showed that there were no savings to be made? (NE)

We are confident that significant savings will be realised. If the project was to be cost neutral, whilst unfortunate, we would still have delivered increased resilience to the Fire and Rescue Service which is the primary driver for the project. If the project was to show a net cost then we would have to revisit the Business Case. It is important to realise that savings will only be realised if new ways of working are adopted by each FRS. The national team will provide guidance to enable this to happen but the savings will only be achieved if all parties work together in partnership.

Q. How do the national team propose to deal with cost apportionment to ensure equitable savings are achieved in all regions? This is particularly apt for the NE as we only have four FRS in the region as opposed to the SE who have nine. (NE)

The FiReControl Finance Working Group (FFWG) are looking at a mechanism to distribute costs. DCLG's fallback position is to ensure cost and savings are shared equitably. The mechanism, however, must be both legal and fair. An option is to distribute costs using a per-head of population model. This might involve each region paying a levy for national costs and as an example the NE might pay 5% of the overall costs and the SE 18%.

Q. Will FRAs have to pay for the costs of discharging the national functions associated with FireControl? (SW)

Yes and these costs have been factored into the business case.

Firelink

Technical Solution

Q. How can we be sure the new Firelink system is resilient? How will it be protected against sabotage, lightning etc (SW)

The new system is designed with resilience in mind, in addition to the dual routing of communications links and power supplies across geographically separate paths critical

sites will have standby power supplies which are capable of maintaining communications facilities without attendance for up to 7 days.

Q. Critics say if Firelink crashes the whole mobilisation system fails how does the solution address this? (EM)

The system has been specified to deliver a 98% confidence level by building resilience into the design. For example, Firelink transmitter sites include UPS (Uninterrupted Power Supply) and Generators to guard against power failure, and are provided with dual data feeds to guard against failures in the transmission system.

The FiReControl mobilisation system does not rely on Firelink, as this is only one method of contacting Resources. Contingency plans are in place for any scenario from the loss of an MDT to complete loss of Firelink.

Q. How will you ensure the new Firelink equipment will not adversely affect the health of users? (SW)

All radio devices used for Firelink in fire service vehicles will comply with requirements set out in our Code Of Practice For Fire & Rescue Service Mobile Equipment Installation. The Government takes seriously concerns over potential health effects from using advanced radio technologies such as used for Firelink. We intend to conduct a risk assessment on the proposed FRS use of the Airwave service which will be informed by the Home Office health monitoring study.

Firelink users will be provided with an opportunity to ask a recognised specialist in the field about health aspects of Firelink, and answers to questions will be published on the project website. We will provide advice to FRS of how they can access this and other health and safety information.

Q. What health risks are associated with the TETRA system? (NE)

The project has looked into the nature of any health risks associated with the TETRA system. This involved reviewing the research carried out on behalf of the Police. At the moment there appears to be no valid evidence to suggest that there is any significant health issues relating to TETRA. However, further research will continue in this area

Q. How will you ensure the new Firelink equipment does not interfere with other electronic equipment used by the Fire Service? (SW)

Individual equipments will be/have been developed to appropriate electrical standards. The installed system in each vehicle will be subject to the tests set out in ' A Code of Practice for Fire Service Mobile Equipment Installation' as part of the Phase B Vehicle Acceptance process. This will check that there is no interference with authorised electronic equipment on board at the time of installation but FRSs will be responsible for ensuring no adverse EMC effects on the Firelink system if further (non-Firelink) equipments are installed at a later date.

Q. Will Airwave cause any interference with Airport systems? (NE)

No, this is an established system currently being used by the Police and many other users. The frequencies used by the Airwave system are totally remote from aviation systems.

Q. Presumably the solution is UHF or VHF. How will such a system cope with the phenomenon of hydrographic masking in the Highlands? (EM)

The Firelink solution will utilise frequencies in the UHF band. In terms of propagation over large masses of water, there has been experience of signal ducting occurring, particularly over *warm waters*, in these frequency ranges. This causes anomalous propagation effects - sometimes enhancing propagation. In general through, propagation effects across a mixed land/water environment will not have a significant impact on the signal.

Q. What about the impact of hills / line of sight? (EM)

For Firelink, the contractor is responsible for siting base stations to ensure the provision of a reliable signal to the agreed standard against the contracted coverage maps for Great Britain. This would take into account both the previous question on Highlands topography and this more general question on the 'line of sight' limitations.

Q. Why is it not satellite? (EM)

The Firelink requirement was developed as an output based specification to encourage competition and avoid unnecessarily precluding potential suppliers from bidding. Bidders had free rein to select whichever technology they felt best met the requirement.

Q. Currently mobile phones are used as an alternative method of communication. Has this also been considered? (NE)

Yes, however, GSM systems do not have the reliability and resilience required for the FRS.

Q. Is the Firelink system similar to the O2 mobile phone network? – if it is I cannot get a signal in certain parts of the County. (NE)

No. There is a fundamental difference between the two systems in terms of frequencies, demographic and geographic coverage. The Firelink project employs a professional mobile radio system rather than a GSM product.

Q. In terms of the Interim solution, will the functionality provide voice only or voice and SMS messaging? (NE)

During the Interim - just voice, however SMS may be available if required depending on the specific interim solution for each FRS.

Q. If Firelink provides the new MDT hardware and Firecontrol the MDT software does this not add to the complexity and increase the risk? (SW)

Firelink is a GB wide procurement and so is best placed to provide the MDT hardware required to run data applications in Scotland and Wales, in addition to England. A single procurement enables financial efficiencies through volume sales and reduces vehicle installation risk as the Firelink contractor has sole responsibility for the complete fit. FiReControl has specified within the Firelink contract, its technical specification for the MDTs.

Q. In T&W we already are using MDTs and mobile data, will we lose this functionality during the Interim period? (NE)

No – existing legacy systems may continue up to the phase C rollout if required by a FRS.

Q. During the interim solution, legacy radios will be replaced with Firelink radios, but what about MDTs? (NE)

Legacy MDTs can still be used by an FRS if required.

Q. Will there be any loss in the current functionality and service compared with the Firelink replacement? (NE)

No, there will be significant improvements, such as voice quality, intra/interoperability and resilience.

Q. Well currently Firefighters can in fact communicate directly with the Control Room from their radio handsets – so there will be a loss of functionality? (NE)

In this case, cross band repeaters are being provided. (NB: Provision in this respect is as an option under Call Off)

Q. What system security will be provided for Firefighters using the SAN C terminals? (NE)

The SAN Cs may be secured and accessed by a PIN code. Local security operational procedures would also detail the process in terms of security, loss or misplacement. Lastly, the system provides a facility to immediately ‘stun’ the terminal if it is confirmed that a terminal has been lost/stolen.

Q. The Police have a have an extremely comprehensive security system for their terminals; will the FRS have to have similar facilities and procedures? (NE)

The Police and FRS have different requirements in their respective levels of security – the FRS level is less than the Police in this respect – so the requirements, in terms of storage etc, will not be as rigorous.

Q. In respect of interoperability, Firelink will provide communications at silver and possibly bronze command, is there a move towards providing communications at an individual level and what is the practical point? (NE)

There would be many difficulties, such as call sign identity or ensuring that the chain of command is not compromised. For example it would be unrealistic and unacceptable for police officers to give FRS personnel direction without going through the correct command structure. The whole area around bronze command is still being discussed but in terms of the current project silver command level communications are only considered.

Q. I understand that the Firelink radios system will provide interoperability with other emergency services which are controlled through talk groups. If the police and ambulance service are in the same talk group, who controls the talk group? (NE)

The control of the talkgroup is predetermined by the fleet map for the system.. However, locally agreed protocols must be established for interagency communications.

Scope of Supply

Q. Are fire ground radios to be provided? (NE)

‘At incident’ communications are not included within the core provision of the contract. Firelink is a replacement for existing FRS wide area radio systems only. Furthermore,

on a practical point, there is currently no TETRA Intrinsically Safe radio terminal available for use at an incident.

Q. Will it be possible to obtain 'IS' radios for officers? (NE)

No, not at this moment of time.

Q. Following the recent report regarding the events of 7/7, will the Airwave system work underground? (NE)

There are a number of systems and projects being developed to enhance Airwave communications in the 'Underground' e.g. the 'Contact' project. In addition Airwave has a quick deployment mobile support system which is PITO facility, mobilised via the Police.

Q. There exist a number of Cat A (Petrochemical) sites within the Region where communications maybe required. I understand that options are available, but why are these options not included in the core contract? (NE)

The Firelink contract is only for replacement of the current FRS radio systems, and as I mentioned previously, 'At Incident' systems are not part of this core provision.

Q. What is the situation regarding the provision of radios to airports etc? (NE)

Provision of radios to 3rd Parties is covered within the contract. A schedule of authorised users has been established in this respect from the data previously obtained from the FRSs'. It is possible for a FRS to lend radios to any other 3rd party for a maximum of 7 days.

Q. What is the situation in respect of PDAs 'v' MDTs for officer's vehicles? (NE)

Some FRS's have experience in using MDTs in officer's vehicles. Many have scrapped this idea due to the practicalities such as battery management etc. Therefore PDAs are currently being discussed within the FiReControl project if and when they become available they will be funded through DCLG if they agree.

Q. So the officers' radios will not be replaced with the PDA? (NE)

There may be options available around this provision.

Q. With regard to the equipment to be provided and installed to Officers vehicles, who decides what equipment and who will pay? (NE)

Firelink provides for the provision of a Firelink radio terminal and a mobile data terminal, the choice of what type of terminals lie with each FRS. The provision is part of the core contract. However, cognisance should be taken of any development of any FiReControl requirements in this respect.

Q. Who is responsible for de-commissioning and who will pay? (NE)

During the rollout the contractor will be responsible for the de-commissioning and removal of legacy equipment as the programme progresses. In respect of Hill Top Sites, DCLG is currently looking at the possibility of using a single contractor to carrying out this process.

Project Management and Rollout

Q. What would be the situation if the system doesn't work or a FRS wishes to return or remain with their legacy system? (NE)

The system will undergo a vigorous and a thorough testing process before going live in the FRS and Region, so the chance of the system not working is minimal. In terms of an FRS deciding to stay with their legacy system, this would of course be a local decision; however the Government requires intra/interoperability and resilience in the WAN systems throughout England, Scotland and Wales.

Q. Firelink requires staff to move to handling both voice and data. How can you be sure that they will be ready for this transition? (SW)

The Firelink contract includes training for FRS Trainers and certain specialist staff directly. This training will occur in advance of each region's rollout to ensure the FRS has time to promulgate this training to all Firelink users. Whilst Firelink will enable the use of data on its system, the software applications will be provided under the FiReControl programme for England; therefore, FiReControl will take responsibility for the associated training and development of standard operating procedures for these data applications.

A Training Working Group has been set up to align training across Firelink, FiReControl and New Dimension projects within DCLG.

Q. There are many unknowns within the programme roll out, we've seen the histogram illustrating the resource implications but we need to know how many vehicles are required and where the installations will actually take place. (NE)

The previous histogram is out of date, a more accurate illustration of resource requirements should be available following the Due Diligence Visits which are currently being carried out. In terms of locations for installations, mobile workshops will be available to assist FRSs. Roll out starts in September 2006, FRSs need discussion on resource requirements as soon as possible.

Q. Tyne and Wear FRS have an excellent facility within the technical services workshops. If Airwave requires the use of this workshop, can T&W charge for its use? (NE)

No

Q. When can we switch off the legacy radio systems? (NE)

This will depend on the confidence of the system at the end of phase A.

Q. In respect of the 8 test vehicles, will they be expected just to continue with their normal duties? (NE)

Yes, except to look at specific coverage deficiencies

Commercial

Q. What is the life span of the system? (NE)

The contract will run for 10 years however there is an option for a three year extension. The contract is also based on an output specification and performance.

Q. Does the 10 years start form the contract signature? (NE)

Yes, from 29th March 2006

Q. Knowing how bad Radio Systems are now at wearing out, what service life is built into the Firelink system? (EM)

It is designed for ten years service life.

Q. Is there any system in place within the contract to prevent escalation of costs? (NE)

With the exception of the change control process this is a fixed price contract with increases of RPI +1% on the 1st April each year.

Q. What happens if the system doesn't work as envisaged? (NE)

There will be rigorous testing throughout the three phases of the programme roll out in addition to specific acceptance criteria which must be satisfactorily addressed before payment. There is also a requirement for the prospective FRS users to be satisfied with the performance via the regional joint roll out boards before milestone payments can be made.

Finance and Funding

Q. What are the revenue costs of the Firelink system? (SW)

It is hoped to be able to release indicative details of the on-going costs in the summer. Proposals are being worked up on the basis that FRAs in a region would not be charged for the core managed service costs of Firelink before all FRAs in that region are able to utilise the service.

Q. What are the service costs? (NE)

At the end of phase C, the monthly service fee for the NE region is £91,459 plus RPI +1%. This is zero rated for VAT.

Q. Devon FRS made a claim under new burdens for the additional costs of their radio system caused by the decision of the Devon police to withdraw from the contract. Devon FRS claimed New Burdens support for the costs incurred. This was refused. They have written again and eagerly await a reply. (SW)

This does not represent a new burden imposed by central Government, and is a matter for the local authorities concerned. DCLG officials will ensure a reply is sent.

Q. What financial contingencies are in place for quality of service or breakdown? (NE)

The performance of the system is constantly monitored– if there is a reduction in these contracted levels of service, service charge penalties are invoked.

Q. Within the service costs is there unlimited usage of the system? (NE)

It is not unlimited, there is a threshold worked out over a 90 day period using the average of the busiest hours with a baseline of 20 million traffic units per user over the region. If usage exceeds this threshold, the FRS will incur charges.

Q. Who is providing the budget for Firelink? (NE)

The capital costs of providing Firelink are being met by DCLG.

Q. When will the charges start when individual FRS's cut over to RCC or when the last FRS cuts over? (NE)

Subject to the confirmed timing of Phase C (as it is dependant on the outcome of the FiReControl competition), the current position is that the charges will start within a region from when the last FRS cuts over to RCC.

Q. FRS's and in particularly metropolitan FRS's are often 'kicked' by central government capping, will there be any assistance within the RSG or statutory spending assessments to offset these service costs? (NE)

No, local government finance determines that money provided under the RSG is distributed locally.

Q. Will there be any undertaking that the RSG will reflect the cost of Firelink? (NE)

DCLG will conduct a survey across the English FRS's, to consider existing and downstream expenditure, after which they will look at the cost differentials and determine any uplift from that data.

Q. Can you explain what you mean by considering existing and downstream expenditure? (NE)

This includes costs for the future and over the previous 5 years, such as the costs of shared sites, upgrades etc. from which the underlying net costs will be determined.

Q. Will this include the existing cost of licence fees? (NE)

Yes

Q. If FRS's take items under call off will this increase the costs in overall usage? (NE)

This would depend on the item. However, if it was an increase in fleet size over the stated tolerance percentage, the monthly service fee would increase.

Q. I'm surprised at the process of the consideration of current radio usage. At the moment there is no charge for the volume of radio traffic, therefore I'm concerned that measures may have to be introduced to prevent unnecessary messages in order to cut costs. (NE)

Following a considerable amount of data analysis in respect of FRS radio traffic, sufficient tolerance has been included in the traffic unit usage for the project.

Q. If there is an increase in the volume of activity carried out by FRSs to incidents such as co-responding, can the FRS recharge the NHS for the associated increase in radio usage? (NE)

The project team is not in a position to comment on this area, however analysis carried out by the Firelink project solely considered data for *existing* statutory special service call activity.