Fire and Resilience Programme Highlights – October 2008

Issued by:
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Addressed to: Please forward to:
The Chair of the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Chief Executive of the County Council
The Clerk to the Fire and Rescue Authority
The Clerk to the Combined Fire and Rescue Authority
The Commissioner of the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority
The Chief Fire Officer

Summary
This continues the series of monthly ‘highlights’ notes to inform Fire and Rescue Authorities (FRAs) and senior staff in the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) of progress with the Programme.

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1.0 New Minister for the Fire and Rescue Service

1.1 Sadiq Khan was appointed as Minister for Community Cohesion and the Fire and Rescue Service, and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, at the Department for Communities and Local Government on 3 October 2008. He was previously a Minister in the Government Whip's Office.

2.0 Firelink

2.1 Technical problems identified during Phase A testing have now been resolved and Phase B roll-out of Firelink to all remaining appliances will start on 24 November. It will begin in the South West Region, with other regions following in the order of the previous roll-out schedule. Timings are being adjusted to take account of the delay in starting Phase B and to allow for the Christmas and New Year period, as well as to reflect comments received from FRAs. A revised high-level schedule has been sent to Regional Delivery Teams and there will be an opportunity to fine-tune this further should FRAs feel it is necessary for operational reasons.

2.2 There will be a Firelink-fitted demonstration appliance at this year’s Emergency Services Show conference and exhibition at Stoneleigh Park in Coventry from 19 to 20 November 2008. Airwave, the Firelink supplier, will be showcasing a demonstration vehicle with an in-cab radio and mobile data terminal. There will be a Firelink project representative on hand at the CLG exhibition stand (F3) to answer questions about the project. Regional or detailed technical and contractual enquiries will be responded to following the event. You can attend the exhibition area of the event for free. For details about the event and to register as an exhibition delegate for free, please visit [www.theemergencyservicesshow2008.com](http://www.theemergencyservicesshow2008.com)

3.0 FiReControl

3.1 Because of proposed changes to the hardware solution and issues regarding access to the Airwave infrastructure for testing, it is likely that some rescheduling of the project may be required. The implications of this are currently being considered, and if timescales do need to change an announcement will be made in due course.

3.2 Fitting of FiReControl equipment continued to take place in October. For example, permission for early station end equipment roll-out was given in Staffordshire and North Yorkshire; control-room console furniture was delivered to the North East Regional Control Centre (RCC); and the installation of Airwave equipment at the South West RCC was completed.

3.3 The East of England RCC building achieved practical completion, on target, on 1 October, and the lease transfer took place on the same day in the North West.

3.4 David Worsley, currently Deputy Chief Fire Officer of Norfolk Fire & Rescue Service, has agreed to act as interim Director of the East of England RCC. The post will be re-advertised externally three months after cut-over, so that a permanent appointment can then be made.
3.5 CLG has received 13 formal feedback letters regarding the Business Case (Part 1). Emerging themes have been identified and CLG will publish a formal response.

4.0 New Dimension

4.1 The National Audit Office (NAO) has concluded its value for money review on the New Dimension project, covering the period from its initial start-up to the present day. The final report was published today, 31 October 2008.

4.2 The report recognises that CLG's investment in New Dimension equipment has enhanced the ability of the Fire and Rescue Service to respond to terrorist attacks and other major incidents and has already been used successfully on many occasions including during the Buncefield Oil Depot fire and the summer floods last year.

4.3 However the report also refers to some funding uncertainty and poor programme, project and financial management in the early days of the project, which resulted in delays in introducing the equipment and cost overruns. While NAO recognises that improvements in programme and financial management have since been made, it states that more needs to be done to address weaknesses.

4.4 The NAO also makes a number of recommendations where it thinks the Department can learn lessons from the procurement of New Dimension kit, and to maximise the operational effectiveness of the programme.

4.5 The NAO's report has been welcomed by Communities and Local Government Fire Minister Sadiq Khan MP who said:

“The NAO records that England’s Fire and Rescue Service’s capacity to respond to major emergencies has been much enhanced as a result of this investment by the Government.

This achievement was due to the expertise of the fire service and the hard work, commitment and enthusiasm of the project team. I thank all involved as their efforts have helped to create a Fire and Rescue Service that is better equipped than ever to deal with major incidents whether they are caused by nature, and industrial accident or terrorist activity.

As the NAO says, it was an achievement for the Department to procure a wide range of complicated equipment and vehicles as it was the first time that the Department had purchased equipment centrally on behalf of the Fire and Rescue Service.”

4.6 A copy of the report can be found on the National Audit Office's website at http://www.nao.org.uk/pn/07-08/07081050.htm.

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