



# DEVON & SOMERSET FIRE & RESCUE AUTHORITY

<b>REPORT REFERENCE NO.</b>	<b>DSFRA/11/20</b>
<b>MEETING</b>	<b>DEVON &amp; SOMERSET FIRE &amp; RESCUE AUTHORITY</b>
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>29 JULY 2011</b>
<b>SUBJECT OF REPORT</b>	<b>FIRE CONTROL CONSOLIDATION</b>
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	<b>Director of Service Delivery</b>
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<i>that the report be noted</i>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<p>Following the termination of the FiReControl project, the Service has been working to identify the best way forward for providing a fire control function for Devon and Somerset.</p> <p>The Service is required to vacate its current control room at Hestercombe House, Somerset, by October 2012, when the lease expires. Somerset County Council has indicated the leased will not be extended nor renewed. The control centre at Service Headquarters, Clyst St. George, will have capacity and systems to mobilise across the whole service albeit it requires refurbishment or redevelopment in the medium term. The current mobilising system at SHQ has been upgraded and although suitable for an interim arrangement is not considered viable in the longer term.</p> <p>The opportunity to consolidate the existing arrangements will achieve significant financial savings, improve the operational management of the Service, provide a solid base to develop a fit for purpose control centre and present opportunities for income generation.</p>
<b>RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS</b>	To be determined but there are likely to be significant financial savings over time.
<b>EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT</b>	
<b>APPENDICES</b>	Nil.
<b>LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS</b>	Nil.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 Following combination it was determined that the proposed Regional Control Centre (RCC), to be supplied under the national FiReControl project, would provide the solution to the issue of merging the former Devon and Somerset Fire Control centres and developing standardised mobilisation protocols. The announcement of the closure of the RCC project now means that the issue of merging the existing control functions is an issue for the Authority to consider.
- 1.2 Since the closure of the RCC project the Service has been in discussion with the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) over the lease for the RCC building in Taunton. Members have previously been informed on the outcome of these discussions but, in summary due, to the differential in the proposed annual cost of the lease and the unsuitability of the building it is no longer an option for a new fire control.
- 1.3 CLG has also indicated that funding will be made available to fire and rescue services (FRS) to develop resilient fire control functions. It has also indicated that the funding will be allocated based on the ability to demonstrate resilience and that it is unlikely that a single FRS would be able to demonstrate suitable resilience. As a consequence, this Service has entered into an outline agreement with three other FRSs (namely, Dorset, Hampshire and Wiltshire) to develop a joint specification for an interoperable mobilising system which - whilst maintaining four independent fire controls - would have the instantaneous back-up of the other three centres. This is a work in progress and outcomes will be reported to members in due course as more detail is known

## **2. HESTERCOMBE HOUSE (SOMERSET COMMAND CENTRE)**

- 2.1 The fire control centre and associated systems support are the only remaining Service asset in the former Somerset FRS headquarters building. The lease for this will expire in October 2012 and enquiries made of Somerset County Council indicate that no extension of lease would be forthcoming. A clause in the lease requires the Service to make good in respect of the removal of hardware from the building prior to hand back. It is estimated that, after the control room closes, this will take 2 months to achieve. Consequently, the final date by which the control room has to cease mobilising appliances is by August 2012.
- 2.2 An additional complication is that, while the software licences associated with the control function are due for renewal from 1 April 2012, the order for the licences has to be placed with the supplier by 1 September 2011. These licences are only available for 12 month periods and will cost approximately £175,000. It follows, therefore, that significant financial savings can be achieved if mobilising from Hestercombe ceases before 31 March 2012. The Service project team is currently exploring the viability of not renewing the software licences and a decision on this will need to be made in due course.

## **3. SERVICE HEADQUARTERS (WESTERN AND CENTRAL COMMAND CENTRE)**

- 3.1 The fire control located on the SHQ site is in need of refurbishment or replacement. Software upgrades were completed in August 2010. While these will be able to provide the capability for mobilising and incident support across all commands in the short to medium term, the system is considered to be outdated and investigations into potential replacements are being actively pursued, as indicated in paragraph 1.3 above. Consolidation onto the SHQ site is at present the preferred outcome.

#### **4. OPERATIONAL PROCEDURES**

- 4.1 There remain a number of differences in mobilising and command procedures. These issues will need to be resolved for the new coordinated control centre to be fully effective. Resolution will be either a new standardised protocol or an agreed work around process to account for the legacy fire appliance specifications until these can be resolved through vehicle modifications or until they reach the end of their planned use.

#### **5. STAFFING MODEL**

- 5.1 The number of staff required for the new fire control will be evaluated and agreed in due course. It is unlikely, however, that this will be as many as the number on duty in the current controls combined. Control room staff will be invited to consider other shift patterns alongside those that are currently in place.
- 5.2 As a consequence of the termination of the RCC project the Service has a number of staff who are on fixed term contracts. These will be reviewed once the staffing model has been agreed.
- 5.3 No compulsory redundancies will be made as a result of the consolidation of the control centres. Voluntary redundancy arrangements will, however, be made available to control room staff a number of whom have already indicated that they would wish to consider this.
- 5.4 Once the staffing model is known, opportunities for control centre staff to be redeployed will be explored. It should be noted, however, that as the Service is downsizing to meet potential budget shortfalls in future years and, as such, opportunities are likely to be limited.

#### **6. CONCLUSION**

- 6.1 Consolidation of fire control will provide a number of significant benefits to the Authority. In financial terms the cost of running the Somerset command centre is approximately £675,000 per annum. While actual savings are difficult to estimate until the replacement staffing model is agreed, it is anticipated these could represent a significant proportion of the current annual running costs.
- 6.2 There is at present some organisational risk in having differing protocols and mobilising arrangements across the Service. The consolidation will mitigate this risk to an acceptable level. Consolidation will also allow for a number of other issues, such as officers rotas, to be addressed benefitting the organisation both financially and in respect of improved resilience.
- 6.3 The consolidation will provide the basis for developing a fit for purpose control and operational intelligence facility in the coming years. The work in partnership with other FRSs on developing resilient, interoperable mobilising arrangements supports this and could also provide income generation as a consequence.
- 6.4 A project implementation plan has been developed to ensure that all affected staff and their representative bodies are engaged in the process of designing and implementing the new consolidated fire control. These will include a new secondary control suite, back up arrangements during consolidation and testing of the new arrangements before go live.

**ACFO PETER SMITH**  
**Director of Service Delivery**