



Mr Clive Betts MP  
Chair of the Communities and Local Government  
Select Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
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**Bob Neill MP**  
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Dear Clive,

### **FIRECONTROL PROJECT: LATEST POSITION**

On 1 April this year the previous Communities and Local Government Select Committee published their report into the FiReControl Project. The report concluded that on balance the project should continue, but made a number of recommendations about how this should be achieved successfully.

As with all major projects across government, we are carefully considering every aspect of the FiReControl project with a view to ensuring that it delivers value for money for the taxpayer. As a result of this on-going review, and the significant decisions to be made as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010, I would propose to provide a fuller response to the Committee's report once these reviews have reached their conclusions.

However, the Committee asked for the Department to respond to one of the recommendations in July. I also wanted, as the Minister now responsible for the fire portfolio, to take this opportunity to set out the latest position on the project.

The Government is opposed to the enforced regionalisation of the Fire Service but recognises the importance of inter-operability and resilience. I come to the FiReControl project from a non-ideological view. The basic concept of FiReControl - a resilient national network of control centres, delivering modernisation and efficiencies - is sound. However, as the report notes, we have so far seen very little of the main IT system delivered. The project has been beset by delays and increasing costs. This situation needs to change and we must ensure that the project is focused on the three delivery basics: time, cost and quality.

Taking each of these in turn, the project must be delivered:

To time: I have been very clear that the IT system needs to be delivered to the contracted milestones. The main contractor EADS has given a clear public commitment on their ability to deliver in mid-2011, including at the Select Committee hearing in February, and now must meet that commitment;

To cost: I have been equally clear that it can no longer be the answer to throw money at this project, particularly in these times of significant economic challenges and public spending restraint; and,

To quality. The Fire and Rescue Service has been promised a system that is generally better than, and at least as good as, their existing systems.

The specific recommendation on which the committee requested an update in July 2010 was that, 'a viable project plan has been agreed with EADS, and report on progress against that plan, in particular the early version of the modified Intergraph product'.

Following the Select Committee's Inquiry in February, the project team carried out an investigation of the schedule with EADS and Fire and Rescue Services. The outcomes of this are being used to draw up a detailed delivery plan, based on EADS contractual milestones. This plan will be refined during discussions with the FRSs over the summer. The Committee will want to be aware that we have now activated contractual milestones with EADS to ensure the system is ready for use in mid-2011.

I was particularly struck by the points made in the report expressing concern that the Committee had not been allowed access to reviews of the project, referred to in the Department's memorandum. I understand that these reviews were withheld as they contained commercially sensitive material and formed part of on-going policy advice informing decisions which had yet to be taken.

The discussions between the Department and EADS are on-going and do, of course, need to be treated sensitively. That said, I see no reason to withhold these documents and as a demonstration of my commitment to a more open dialogue with the Committee I am arranging for these reviews to be shared with you directly as Chair, on a confidential basis. I know you will respect the commercial sensitivities and will treat the material appropriately. Equally, I understand your need to access the material you need to carry out your job effectively.

I hope that you find this response useful and I would be happy for you to circulate this letter to the other members of your Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Neill', with a large, stylized initial 'B' and a long, sweeping tail.

**BOB NEILL MP**