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not allow the creation of a public company (The government's preferred option) to build and run the new control centres. Councillors would become directors and if the project failed or the company went bust, they could be personally liable.

The South East RMB, failed to endorse the government's proposals and is seeking further information and clarification from the ODPM.

Yorkshire and Humberside RMB unanimously expressed its "extreme disquiet" at the plans. It did not accept that the outline business case "as currently presented, is achievable financially and practically" and called on the ODPM to withdraw the proposals.

The result has been that the project dates have been put back again. The ODPM will no longer set target dates because it has not met any of the previous ones. The project is now considered to have "fluid" dates – meaning government will make them up as it goes along and then claims they have hit its targets.

But the government is also coming under mounting political pressure. The Tories have said the proposals should be scrapped and accused the government of putting its political agenda ahead of public safety.

The party said the decision to start announcing the location of the eight new regional control centres has been deliberately put back until after the expected general election on 5 May. It claimed fire authorities are already losing control centre staff because of worries about future job prospects and that this was damaging the service.

Conservative fire spokesman Philip Hammond said: "Fire safety is far too important to be subordinated to political agendas. It's time John Prescott abandoned his failed dream of regionalising England and started concentrating on providing effective fire safety."

The move came after a hastily organised House of Commons Standing Committee was set up to look at the ODPM's fire service national framework which includes the plans to regionalise fire controls.

Despite receiving almost no notice, the union gave a detailed briefing to all the committee's MPs on both the National Framework document and the regional control plan.

The union is pressing hard on other political fronts. General secretary Andy Gilchrist has written to all the members of two key Parliamentary committees demanding that they investigate the plans. All MPs on the powerful House of Commons Public Accounts Committee have been contacted twice by the union to ask them to investigate the project. The committee is charged with ensuring that government services provide value for money.

Committee chair Edward Leigh, is discussing the issues raised by the union with the National Audit Office.

The union has also written to all members of the ODPM select committee raising our concerns.

The union's campaign has prompted an extraordinary reaction from the ODPM. After we leaked the details of the business case Local and Regional Government Minister Nick Raynsford, whose brief includes the fire service, was forced into a quickly organised briefing of all MPs.

TWO MINUTE CAMPAIGN

TAKE two minutes to tell your MP this project is a mistake. Simply log on to www.fbu.org.uk and go to "Lobby your MP". All you need do is put in your postcode, the campaign kit will work out who your MP is and you can send him or her a pre-prepared letter outlining concerns.

It's that simple and it takes less than two minutes of your time. It's worth it.

We are told by two of those who were briefed that they had more concerns after the briefing than they had before. Nick Raynsford also wrote an extraordinary letter to the chairs of local fire authorities – leaked to the FBU – blaming them for leaking the outline business case to the union.

Raynsford, said in the letter: "I was very disappointed that the draft outline business case that was circulated in confidence to fire and rescue authority chairs appears to have been leaked to the FBU and is now publicly available on their website."

In fact it could not have been any of the fire authority chairs who leaked the details in the document, as Raynsford well knows. Their copies had the essential financial details blanked out, due to "commercially confidentiality".

Even the chairs of regional management boards were only shown copies of the full document, which were all hastily gathered up after their meeting. So they had no copies to leak either.

In an even more astonishing outburst Raynsford claims that the FBU lied about the document. He said: "The quote 'very high risk' does not appear at all in the document. The phrase 'total project failure' is extracted in isolation from a discussion of risks that all projects face."

Not true. The government's outline business case quite clearly says that there is a "high/very high risk" of "total project failure" in a table on page 52 of the report and in explanatory text below it. And when the authors say "total project failure" they make it clear they mean catastrophic failure.

And the context was an assessment of the risks faced by this particular project, not a generalised discussion about risks faced by all projects.

In fact the risk assessment identified four other areas of high risk where the impact of failure would be substantial. No one reading that part of the document could come to any conclusion other than that the project involved a considerable gamble on several fronts.