

# THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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## **REGIONAL FIRE CONTROL PROJECT: NOW OFFICIALLY THREE YEARS LATE AND 14 TIMES THE ORIGINAL COST ESTIMATES**

Plans to close down all forty six of the fire service's 999 command and control centres in England and move to 9 regional centres are now officially three years late and 14 times over budget according to the latest figures. The Fire Brigades Union says the government needs to urgently re-think the plans, the time scales and the cost of the project now standing at £1.4 billion.

The Department for Communities and Local Government has repeatedly condemned the FBU for "scaremongering" over warnings that the plans would face major delays and that costs would soar. The new centres were set to start opening in November 2006 and are not now due to start opening until October 2009, a delay of nearly three years.

In a written House of Commons answer given on 27 October 2005 regarding the original cost estimates for regional fire controls then fire minister Jim Fitzpatrick said consultants Mott MacDonald "estimated project costs at £100 million, comprising project management costs, technology costs, accommodation costs and redundancy." That original estimate jumped to £1 billion, with the latest Government answer to a question in the House of Lords confirming the cost will rise to £1.4 billion, 14 times the original estimate.

FBU General secretary Matt Wrack said: "Long delays and soaring costs have made this a disaster for the fire service. The entire UK fire service only costs £1.7 billion a year to run, so this is using up money on a scale the service has never seen before.

"Frontline fire stations and firefighters are being threatened with cuts while this Project soaks up hundreds of millions of pounds. The money could be spent on frontline fire services but is instead being diverted into this money pit of a Project.

"The Government needs to re-think its plans and consider what impact this is having in local fire authorities being bled dry of cash. The current uncertainty and the burden this is placing on the fire service simply cannot be allowed to go on."

**CONTACT:** Duncan Milligan 07736 818100

House of Lords - Written Answer The following question was answered on 18 December 2007.

Lord Hanningfield asked Her Majesty's Government:

When each of the nine regional fire control centres will become operational; what is the anticipated start date for each centre; and whether each start date differs from the earliest-made estimate for each centre. [HL845]

Baroness Andrews: The forecast go-live dates for each of the nine region control centres are:

October 2009-east Midlands, north-east and south-west

January 2010-West Midlands

May 2010-south-east

September 2010-north-west

November 2010-London

January 2011-Yorkshire and Humberside

May 2011-east of England.

Estimates for the regional rollout order and earliest achievable dates for all the nine regions were first published in November 2004. When this information was published, it was made clear that it was indicative and there was a high degree of uncertainty around the dates. The rollout dates have been refined as the technology and accommodation procurements have progressed.

**FBU comment: the dates published in November 2004 were for the first three centres to be fully operational in November 2006, which has now slipped (see above) to “go live” – partially operational - from October 2009**

Hanningfield - Fire and Rescue Service (Costs of the FiReControl Project)

House of Lords - Written Answer

The following question was answered on 18 December 2007.

Lord Hanningfield asked Her Majesty's Government:

- What is the current estimated total cost for the delivery of the FiReControl project; how this figure compares to estimates made in (a) 2004; (b) 2005; and (c) 2006; and what are the reasons for any variance between these figures, other than annual inflation. [HL843]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Communities and Local Government (Baroness Andrews): **The 2007 FiReControl business case estimates total costs for the delivery of the FiReControl project to be £1.4 billion over 15 years (2004-05 to 2019-20).** The outline business case published in 2005 had previously estimated total costs to be £1 billion over 13 years (2004-05 to 2017-18). This variance is due to increased certainty on costs following the award of the IT contract and signing of the lease agreements, the addition of a further two years of running costs and annual inflation.

**FBU comment: the only reference is to those costs contained in the Outline Business Case. There is no mention of the original estimate of £100 million revealed on 27 October 2005 by Jim Fitzpatrick that we quote above. The £1.4 billion is only for the first 15 years, in fact the new buildings are leased for between 20 and 25 years.**