

THE FIRE BRIGADES UNION

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WHITEHALL NEEDS TO RE-THINK REGIONALISATION PLANS AFTER SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT STOPS CLOSURE OF EMERGENCY FIRE CONTROLS

Whitehall needs to urgently re-think plans to close all 46 emergency fire controls in England and move to one control for each region says the Fire Brigades Union. The call came after an announcement that plans to reduce the number of emergency fire controls in Scotland have been halted.

Scotland will now get all the benefits of an enhanced digital radio system, interoperability between emergency fire controls and other emergency services, modern data terminals in fire appliances and real time updates of the exact position of vehicles much cheaper and much faster than England. In England the regional control project is now running years late, costs are ten times the original estimate of £100 million and it is placing enormous burdens on the fire service.

FBU General secretary Matt Wrack said: “Scotland has looked into the abyss and quite rightly stepped back. They will now get a better and more resilient system which is much cheaper and quicker than that planned for England.

“It makes a real difference when Government takes the time to engage with frontline staff and the fire service before key decisions are made. Whitehall made poor decisions in the face of overwhelming opposition within the fire service at the time.

“The Whitehall obsession with a regionalised structure in England is bleeding the fire service dry of money and personnel. This is an example of public money being wasted on another IT project of dubious benefit and which diverts money from frontline services.

“Scotland has understood those issues, Whitehall has not. It is not technology and buildings which gives us the resilience to deal with major incidents. It is professional fire crews and emergency control staff which give us that strength and we have never failed the public.”

In a written House of Commons answer given on 27 October 2005 on the original estimates of the costs of regional fire controls in England fire minister Jim Fitzpatrick said consultants Mott MacDonald “estimated project costs at £100 million, comprising project management costs, technology costs, accommodation costs and redundancy.”

The costs are now officially over £1 billion and rising.